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**Shakespeare and his critics,**



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# **SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CRITICS**



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# SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CRITICS

BY

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TO  
DR. HORACE HOWARD FURNESS  
IN RECOGNITION OF THE DEBT  
DUE HIM FROM ALL  
THE FRIENDLY ADMIRERS OF  
SHAKESPEARE'S ENDOWMENTS



## PREFACE

THE object of this book is to give an outline of the attitude of the English and American literary world towards the plays of William Shakespeare from the seventeenth century to the present time. The verdict of the world of playgoers, that some of the plays when well acted were far better worth seeing than those of any other dramatist, has been the same for all generations. But the estimate of the plays by professional writers, as reflected in literary criticism, has varied, or rather the views on which the estimate was based have varied, greatly. For a long time it was a matter of faith with most of them that Shakespeare was ‘irregular,’ because his construction and method differed widely from that of the dramatists of Greece. Admitting that he was a unique genius, as shown in many passages of force and beauty, it was thought that the plays would be much better if they were less original and more imitative of the ancient models, and the poet had always kept to a certain dignity of diction and situation, and in particular had observed the formal rules which were supposed to be deduced from the plays of the ancient dramatists and were known as the three unities. English common sense continually rebelled against the contention that an English poet lacked taste and culture because he did not imitate the methods or style of the poets of another race, and the position was finally abandoned in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Coleridge barely alludes to it, and Lamb and Hazlitt of the early nineteenth century ignore it completely.

The critics of the eighteenth century were largely occupied with endeavors to establish a standard text by emendation and conjecture. Quite generally they looked at the plays from the standpoint of the theatre, ignoring the idea that the tragedies were commentaries on human nature and possessed an absolute quality like truth or beauty. Dr. Johnson is typical of this class, if he is not too extreme an instance of common sense to be typical of that excellent quality. Though these critics rebelled rather timidly against slavish obedience to the authority of ‘the ancients,’ the idea that the author was an untutored, natural genius, who would have been much improved by a university training, was not fully eradicated. The true nature of art was not philosophically grasped, and the profound relation of the plays to life was but dimly hinted at. The idea that the characters could be discussed exactly as if they were real, that they differed from historic characters in possessing more interesting personalities, in being placed in more complicated and trying situations, and, therefore, exemplifying more fully the passions of men, did not occur to the critics till very late in the eighteenth century. Nor was it discovered till towards the close of the eighteenth century that Shakespeare’s female characters bear almost as close a relation to feminine nature as his heroes do to manly nature. In fact, both of these views may be said to belong to the romantic school of the nineteenth century.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the critics of the so-called romantic school, who viewed life and literature from the standpoint of the emotions, widened the scope of criticism and justified the preëminence of the poet by more refined considerations. Coleridge was the leading figure of this school, in which, though enthusiasm tended to rhapsodical generalizations, the

conception of literature and art became more spiritual. The importation of notions from the German æsthetic school gave a new philosophic basis and added elements to criticism, which, if sometimes tending to mystic indefiniteness, were at least part of a system of thought.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the success of the scientific method applied to the material and animate world affected the tone of critical thought, and, indeed, of all reasoning. Great attention was paid to details of material form, and some remarkable discoveries resulted from exact analysis of the verse of different plays. At the same time there was a disposition to minimize the elements of wonder and reverence, and to reduce all critical considerations to rational grounds. This corrected some of the extravagancies of the romanticists, but in some instances overdid itself by sinking the æsthetic quality of the play and concentrating attention on matters that could be counted and generalized mathematically, or by accumulating a mass of historic details of slight significance and regarding the accumulation as an end. This is quite evident in the writings of Messrs. Furnival, Fleay, and Simpson. The influence of the scientific method is also apparent in a tendency towards minute subdivisions such as are properly made in botany and geology, and further in a disposition to treat the poet and his plays as ordinary phenomena, natural products to be accounted for by favorable circumstances, a view which leads to erroneous conceptions as surely as does the other extreme, that poetry is the result of a direct inspiration from some source outside the inspired individual. Many critics who may be regarded as natural-born romanticists, or perhaps influenced by the later-day æsthetes, combatted the scientific critics vigorously.

In the end, however, the scientific method was lim-

ited to careful scrutiny of facts and rational deduction therefrom, tempered by a consciousness that the material criticised was great poetry, a product of the imagination as well as of the reason, and dependent on a faculty which, if not abnormal in its nature, is so excessive in the favored individual as to be abnormal in energy, and, therefore, creative. In Professors Bradley and Lounsbury we have critics to whom poetry is a wonderful and beautiful thing, but who sift evidence and form no conclusions not legitimately based on evidence. They might be called rational romanticists, combining learning and culture. They have a sublimated common sense and a comprehension of the function of great art which to the mathematicians is foolishness.

Of course men of any type may exist in any period. A romantic individualist like Mr. Swinburne may be contemporary with the most rigorous scientist like Mr. Fleay, a man of ponderous common sense like Dr. Gervinus may succeed a romanticist like Schlegel. Hallam closely follows Coleridge, instead of preceding him by a generation. Nevertheless, there is a development of thought in Shakespearean criticism. Considering the effort that has been expended on it, it would be discouraging were there not signs of more catholic views and increasing breadth of grasp.

This book considers only the principal critics. The first volume of Knight's Cabinet Edition contains a brief review of the critical writings on Shakespeare down to 1850, but is principally taken up with an account of various editions. It is out of print. The copious extracts in Dr. Furness's Variorum Edition apply to individual plays. Professor Lounsbury's volumes give a minute history of Shakespearean criticism for the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

None but professionals can read all the originals. This book, growing out of college lectures, is intended for the ordinary reader.

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C. F. JOHNSON.

HARTFORD, September, 1908.



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# SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CRITICS

## CHAPTER I

### THE DEPARTMENTS OF SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM

LITERARY criticism has been one branch of the writer's profession since the days of Aristotle. Shakespeare is so preëminently an important and interesting figure in our literary history that the criticism of his plays forms a large library. Some of it is unintelligent, but it cannot be said that any part of it is unimportant, because the gradual development of reasonable views on the subject is parallel to the gradual growth of liberalism in religion and politics. The history of Shakespearean criticism is an epitome of the history of the general mind of Christendom since the seventeenth century. There is to be seen in both the same progress from conservatism and reverence for authority to reliance on reasoned principles based on an examination of the thing itself regardless of the codified law, and also the same perception that codified law is not necessarily erroneous because it is ancient, but, unless misinterpreted, is an expression of truth, with the reservation that it is truth as it appeared to the general mind in a certain stage of its development. We have learned to respect both Samuel Johnson and Samuel Coleridge. Shakespearean criticism has its historical value and slow line of development as much as free institutions. It may well be, too, that it is still in the same partially developed condition.

Shakespearean literature concerns itself with several distinct kinds of subject-matter.

#### I. TEXTUAL CRITICISM

As the plays of Shakespeare were printed long before large publishing establishments had brought the art of proof-reading to its present state of exactness, and were particularly unfortunate in not coming under the eye of a corrector of any intelligence, the first editions, the large folio of 1623 and the earlier quartos, are full of errors. Some of the plays in the folio were much better printed than others, perhaps because the copy was better; but in all the proof was very imperfectly corrected, if corrected at all. It seems as if it were a matter of indifference to the compositors whether the words they set up were intelligible or not. In questions of punctuation their rule apparently was: when in doubt use a question mark. In consequence, the first thing to do when Shakespeare's works were edited in 1709 was to correct the most obvious mistakes, many of which were so plainly typographical as to call for no ingenuity. But others present all degrees of difficulty.

The main authority for the text is the large folio volume of 1623, of which some hundred copies are known to exist. It was brought out, seven years after Shakespeare's death, by two of his partners, who, although they did not understand the duties of publishers very well, may be supposed to have desired to produce as good a book as possible, and in particular to have included all the plays of their late associate which could justly be called his composition. This First Folio, then, is the basis of the Shakespearean text; for the Second Folio, the Third Folio, and the Fourth Folio are merely reprints issued with no systematic effort at improvement. But before the printing of the folio many of the plays had

been printed soon after their production in pamphlet form, apparently against the wishes of the promoters of the theatre,<sup>1</sup> for the editors speak of them as 'stolen and surreptitious copies.' Many of these have survived, varying greatly in quality, and these very editors used seven of them as printer's copy, although they stigmatized them all as stolen. In some cases the quarto is fuller than the same play in the folio. In others the folio is the better; and for eighteen it is the sole authority, no quarto having come down to us for *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Winter's Tale*, *As You Like It*, *Cymbeline*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Timon of Athens*, and several others. Of some of the plays several quartos were issued; six or seven of *Richard III* and four of *Richard II*. In some cases, when the dates are far apart, the quartos show the play in different stages of development, and are then, as in the case of *Hamlet*, of great value in showing how the author amplified his work. In some instances different copies of the same edition of a quarto differ, as if the presswork had been stopped and changes made in the form. As the early quartos,

<sup>1</sup> There seems to have been a brisk demand for 'playbooks' in the seventeenth century. Prynne, author of *Histriomastix*, 1633, says that forty thousand of them were issued in the two years before his writing. This is within the bounds of possibility. They were used in the theatre as prompt-books, as is evident from the fact that in some of them the names of the actors are written before the entrances of the character. In the folio the name of Kemp, the famous comedian who took the part, appears a number of times in the place of Dogberry in the margin, showing that *Much Ado About Nothing* was set up from the very copy used by the prompter. But doubtless the greater number were bought for individual reading. After the printing of the folio many Shakespearean quartos were issued down to the eighteenth century. These are known as 'players' quartos,' and are not of the slightest value in settling disputed readings, and of little as bibliographic curiosities.

even if surreptitious, are authentic, it is evident that they are valuable in settling disputed readings, and that the labor of collating or comparing them line by line with the folio was a task requiring infinite patience and industry. It was begun in the eighteenth century, and carried out in the course of one hundred and fifty years by English and German scholars, to whom the thanks of posterity are due.

Dr. Johnson advised the student to read the plays through before consulting any notes. It is true that all or very nearly all of the famous passages are correctly printed and need no textual commentary, and it is true also that we gather the suggested meaning of poetry without a logical comprehension of the words and phrases. But the young student who reads the first three acts of *Winter's Tale*, or any part of *Cymbeline*, or many passages of other plays where the style is involved and condensed, or the allusions dark to him, certainly needs illustrative notes and a text in which the principal errors are corrected and the punctuation modernized. Suppose him to come across the following speech of the Duke of Buckingham in the first scene of the first act of *Henry VIII*:—

Why the devil,  
Upon this French going out, took he upon him,  
Without the privity of the King, to appoint  
Who should attend him? He makes up the file  
Of all the gentry; for the most part such  
To whom as great a charge as little honour  
He meant to lay upon: and his own letter,  
The honourable board of council out,  
*Must fetch him in he papers.*

He readily understands that the ‘French going out’ is the embassy to France when Henry met Francis on the Field of the Cloth of Gold; possibly he may see that

the next to the last line is parenthetical and means, the council not being in session, or being disregarded ; but if he can interpret the last line without a note telling him that ‘him’ is equivalent to ‘him whom,’ also that ‘papers’ is a verb, meaning ‘puts on the list,’ he is one of a thousand.

The errors which have been corrected come under several heads : —

(a) In some cases speeches are plainly attributed to the wrong person, in the folio and quartos both, as, for example, in the speech of the ghost in *Hamlet* : —

Thus was I, . . .

Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, . . .

No reckoning made, but sent to my account

With all my imperfections on my head ;

*O, horrible ! O, horrible ! most horrible !*

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.

It seems unlikely that the ghost, who has but a few minutes left, should interrupt himself to comment on his murder, and natural that his son should interject the line beginning, ‘O, horrible !’ and not confine the expression of his feeling to dumb show. It is very easy for the printer to omit the speaker’s name. The speech is usually taken by the actor of Hamlet, and it would seem rightly. But there are other cases where the transference of speeches is not warranted, though the sequence of ideas would be more manifest if it were done.

(b) As a matter of course many words and phrases used in 1600 have since become obsolete. Some of these are explained as allusions to social customs, to folklore of the day, or to sports, as archery, hawking, or bowls. The vocabulary of slang is very ephemeral. No one ever uses wrongly a slang expression of his time, but it is sometimes very difficult to appreciate the force of ob-

solete slang, and the same may be said of fashionable jargon and the current style of wit. This is especially evident in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and is one of the subjects that need illuminating notes. All these questions have been pretty well threshed out, and this book will be concerned with them only incidentally. The reader soon learns from the context that, with Shakespeare, sad means serious, but not melancholy; conceit, mental conception, not egotistic self-esteem; favor, countenance, not good-will; complexion, natural composition, not hue of skin; owe, own, not be indebted; and the significance of many other words which are not obsolete but have changed their shade of meaning. But he learns it more readily from having it pointed out to him.

(c) Closely allied to the above is the question of grammatical construction. Shakespeare knew nothing of our modern rules, and would have disregarded them cheerfully in favor of current usage had they been drilled into him. His usage was of course the good usage of his day, for he was very sensitive to the significance of words as well as to English syntax, though he wrenched both in the latter part of his life when vigorous expression was in question. That he uses 'who' when we should say 'whom,' and writes 'none' with the plural or singular verb according to the shade of meaning, is not a matter of great importance either way. As a rule his style is very idiomatic, and therefore offensive to purists.

(d) In places where the original sources fail to convey an intelligible meaning, conjecture has been resorted to, sometimes with happy effect and sometimes with inconceivable ineptitude. For example, in *Twelfth Night* the Duke says of music:—

That strain again:— it had a dying fall:  
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound

That breathes upon a bank of violets  
Stealing and giving odour.

Though music is a ‘sound,’ it is difficult to see how it could confer or convey smell. Pope changed ‘sound’ to ‘south,’ which makes the passage one of those appropriate images disclosing the essence of the thing described, a creation of a poet. The damp south wind in spring passing over beds of flowers does steal and give odor. Nevertheless, the emendation is not universally or even generally accepted.

Another famous and universally accepted change is less satisfactory. In *Henry V*, II, iii, Dame Quickly, describing the death of Sir John Falstaff, says, ‘His nose was as sharp as a pen and a table of green fields.’ Theobald, an excellent critic of the eighteenth century, the man who incurred the enmity of Pope, who called him ‘poor piddling Tibbalds’ in the *Dunciad* because he had pointed out some of the shortcomings of Pope’s edition, emended this passage to read: ‘For his nose was as sharp as a pen and he babbled of green fields.’ Whoever has witnessed the deathbed of an old man of the Falstaff type knows that the delightful old reprobate never weakened to a commonplace pathos in the stupor that precedes dissolution. ‘His nose was as sharp as a pen’ is precisely the realism of a woman like Quickly, to whose mind details like the ‘dish of prawns’ and the ‘parcel-gilt goblet’ are always present, and Mr. Collier’s suggestion: ‘His nose was as sharp as a pen on a table of green frieze’ seems nearer the true reading. But the former is universally accepted.

In some cases, like ‘that runaway’s eyes may wink’ in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is impossible to hit on a satisfactory reading, though we should like exceedingly to know who ‘runaway’ was. The conjecture ‘rumour’s

'eyes' is not altogether satisfactory, and the question is insoluble. In other cases the true word or the meaning of the word is of little consequence, as in *The Tempest*, when Caliban, in an excess of loyalty to his new master, Stefano, says, 'I'll bring thee to clustering filberds, and sometimes I'll get thee young scammels from the rock.'

What are scammels? Sea birds or oysters? It is of no consequence that we cannot tell. They were something good to eat,—excellent beyond question,—and the freckled whelp knew where they most did congregate.

There are some hundred and eighty cases where conjecture is at a loss. These are known as 'cruxes.' Many of the ingenious minds of the nineteenth century commented on these and endeavored to suggest a meaning. When a line has apparently dropped out in the printing, it is hopeless to attempt to replace it, so much of the force of Shakespeare's verse depends on the individual choice and collocation of the words. For instance, in the first act and first scene of *Hamlet*, Horatio is describing the portents that appeared

In the most high and palmy state of Rome,  
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell.

He says:—

The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead  
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;  
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,  
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star  
Upon whose influence Neptune's Empire stands  
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.

In the above 'stars' and 'disasters' are plainly subjects with no verb. Perhaps a line was omitted by the compositor. If so, it has dropped into oblivion. It has been suggested that 'disasters in the sun' might be changed

to 'disastrous, dimmed the sun,' but that will not do, for comets do not dim the sun, and, besides, we cannot give up the great phrase 'disasters in the sun.' Here, then, is a place when Heminge and Condell failed in their promise to give us the plays 'cured and perfect of their limbs, and all the rest absolute in their numbers as he conceived them,' and modern ingenuity cannot touch it. We must submit to one of the great historical misfortunes. Fortunately few of the insoluble cruxes occur in passages as beautiful as the above. In some cruxes a meaning is dimly shadowed but cannot be formulated. The various suggestions and conjectures as to the force of the words and as to the true reading in these cases are brought together with great patience and fidelity by Dr. Furness in the notes on the plays contained in his great Variorum Edition, and it is to be regretted that he does not oftener sum up the argument and give a decision, which no one is more competent to do. Some of the guesses are more plausible than others, but as a rule no one is convincing. The unjustifiable suggestions of the eighteenth century have as a rule been rejected. The Globe Edition — based on the Cambridge Edition of Aldis and Wright — is an example of conservative scholarship. In it the passages where a definite meaning cannot be gathered without violent conjecture are marked with a dagger. They number 185, if the writer counted correctly, and even some of these suggest a logical thought, shadowy perhaps, but not entirely dark.

It was of course absolutely necessary first to settle as nearly as possible on all textual questions. The subject has been exhausted, and the argument for the various conjectural readings is easily accessible. Nevertheless, the following interpretation by Mr. F. Sturges Allen of Springfield, almost unquestionably correct, was made in the spring of 1907: —

No, 't is slander,  
 Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue  
 Outvenoms all the worms of Nile, whose breath  
 Rides on the posting winds, and *doth belie*  
 All corners of the world.—*Cymbeline*, III, iv, 38.

In order to make sense of this, *belie* has been interpreted, 'filled with lies,' a meaning for which no authority can be found. The ordinary meaning is, to calumniate. But Mr. Allen points out on the authority of the New English Dictionary that *belie* from another source meant 'to lie around, to encompass, to beleaguer.' This carries out the strong image in 'whose breath rides on the posting winds.' A slander encompasses the remote parts of the world. This must be the sense intended by Shakespeare.

## II. THE VERSE-FORM

Another subject of criticism is the metre and scansion, question of emphasis and adjustment of voice. This is largely a matter for the consideration of the actor. Any one with a reasonably good ear learns readily the movement of the Shakespearean verse. Rarely does the ten-syllable line or the eleven-syllable line present any difficulties. The end-stopt verse of *Love's Labour's Lost* has a different beauty from the overflow verse of *Lear* and *Cymbeline*, but both are poetic forms, used by the author at different periods of his life. The first play opens:—

*King.* Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives,  
 Live registered upon our brazen tombs  
 And then grace us in the disgrace of death ;  
 When, spite of cormorant devouring Time,  
 The endeavour of this present breath may buy  
 That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge  
 And make us heirs of all eternity.

The first lines of Imogen in *Cymbeline* are :—

*Im.* Dissembling Courtesy ! How fine this tyrant  
Can tickle where she wounds ! My dearest husband,  
I something fear my father's wrath, but nothing  
(Always reserved my holy duty) what  
His rage can do on me : you must be gone,  
And I shall here abide the hourly shot  
Of angry eyes ; not comforted to live  
But that there is this jewel in the world,  
That I may see again.

The different way in which the phrases and clauses lie embedded in the verse is quite evident. In the first extract, grammar and metre frequently coincide, in the next more rarely. The simplest way of distinguishing the end-stopt and the overflow verse is to observe the greater number of punctuation marks at the ends of the lines of the first, but a better way is to notice the great difference of the movement of the two when they are read aloud. The latter is more free and has an element of careless strength in its freedom ; it is more conversational and dramatic, and Shakespeare used it more and more as he grew older. Thus the proportion of end-stopt lines to overflow lines in *Love's Labour's Lost* is 1 in 18, and in *Cymbeline* is 1 in  $2\frac{1}{2}$ , and the rate of increase in the intermediate plays is pretty nearly uniform.

The normal line of Shakespeare's plays is the iambic pentameter, consisting of ten syllables with the accent on the even-numbered syllables. But as the number of accents is more important than their position, the line is properly distinguished as the five-accent line, or the line of five stresses, and as occasionally one of the feet or divisions of the line contains three syllables, it is sometimes called the line of five measures. Occasionally we find lines of two measures, of three measures,

and even of six measures, but rarely of four measures.

A young man in his first serious attempts at writing adheres closely to the formal rules. As he acquires more experience and more confidence, he learns that the object of his work is to attain a certain literary effect,—force, euphony, or artistic presentation,—and that sometimes the rules can properly be disregarded and the object attained by that very disobedience. Great men like Shakespeare can trust their instinct in this. We find that he modified his metrical practice considerably as he grew older. The change was partly due to the change in literary fashion that took place during his life and partly to his own increasing perception of the essence of metrical art. Taking one of his earliest and one of his later plays, we find the following proportions:<sup>1</sup>—

	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> (1593)	<i>Winter's Tale</i> (1611)
Number of lines of two measures	12	14
Number of lines of three measures	13	19
Number of lines of four measures	0	13
Number of lines of six measures	1	16

That is, he used lines of irregular length more frequently in the later play. In Shakespeare's first plays he frequently rhymed his ten-syllable verses. This practice he gradually abandoned.

Rhyming lines in <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	1028
Rhyming lines in <i>Hamlet</i>	81
Rhyming lines in <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	42

<sup>1</sup> From Mr. Furnivall's tables.

Another change in Shakespeare's versification is noteworthy. The line of five accents but eleven syllables is very well adapted to conversational delivery. The last foot of this is usually an amphibrach, for example:—

Farewell, a long farewell, to all *my greatness*.

The increasing use of this is shown in Mr. Furnivall's tables; the proportion of eleven-syllable lines in *Love's Labour's Lost* is 4 per cent; in *Winter's Tale*, 31 per cent; and in *The Tempest*, 33 per cent.

The normal ten-syllable blank verse line ends, of course, with an accented syllable. Towards the end of his life Shakespeare fell into the habit of ending the line occasionally with an unimportant syllable, like 'by,' 'for,' 'from,' — conjunctions which evidently belong to the first word of the next line.

These are called weak endings. He also sometimes ended a line with a monosyllabic pronoun or verb belonging to the next line 'like,' 'can,' 'did,' 'am,' 'be,' 'I,' etc. These are called light endings.

His habit or usage at certain periods is so well marked in the plays whose date of composition is known, that the metrical style of other plays, the date of which is not fixed, determines approximately the period of their production. The matter of metrical structure is therefore of more than merely mechanical importance; it marks the technical development of the greatest artist of our race.

The notion that by getting the percentage of rhymed lines, overflow lines, weak-ending lines, and the like, the student can attain exact evidence as to the date of a play or decide the precise parts of a play written by each of two or three joint authors, is very fascinating to certain minds. They feel a pride in using a new

organ which seems to impart to literature the precision of science. But the method, like all statistics, must be used with great precaution. Its success depends on the presumption that a poet, having modified his metrical scheme, never goes back to his earlier style. This is not entirely true, for the style depends somewhat on the subject-matter. Suppose that at a late period in his career Shakespeare had thought it worth while to rewrite *Love's Labour's Lost*. If his associates and he had thought it a good idea, he might have done so immediately after he had finished *Cymbeline*. He would have retained a good deal of the old rhyming matter and have assimilated the new and the old, have struck out the farcical scenes, and have elevated Armado, Holofernes, and Moth into the region of witty comedy. He would have remodeled the last act entirely and have produced a play in the true comic spirit. In doing so he would have recast nearly all the prose in the play because the wit is forced and thin. The result would be a play with nearly as many rhymes as the present one; and there is no reason why it should not be virtually the work of his last period, for such a rewriting would result in a new production. In other words, Shakespeare could have written a rhyming society comedy at any period of his life, the only difference being that it would have been a far better comedy if written when he was forty-nine than if written when he was twenty-nine. And the conditions which would have led him to do so are by no means inconceivable. There is nothing absolute about rhyme percentages.

Mr. Fleay, to whom we all owe so much, has in his *Shakespeare Handbook* carried this method to extremes. He proves that *Twelfth Night* must have been written at two different periods, and divides it into two separate structural parts, — the Viola story and the Toby-

Aguecheek-Maria story. This is manifestly a *reductio ad absurdum*, for the play is evidently a unit and the parts could not have been prepared separately and then put together. Mr. Swinburne, in his *Study of Shakespeare*, has put a capital bit of satire in the appendix, entitled a ‘Report of a Session of the Newest Shakespeare Society.’ It is excellent fooling, though the fun is a trifle heavy-handed, and as good an argument against introducing scientific methods into literary criticism as could be imagined. The scientific spirit may well be infused with the appreciation of art, but the strict scientific method is inapplicable, for method depends on material handled.

Technical methods are not of the essence of art. There are other more important though unformulated qualities. Such a verse as :—

Now cracks a noble heart : — Good night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

is a poetic expression of manly grief. Its supreme beauty is not affected by the fact that the fourth foot of the second line is a trochee. It is one of many hundred collocations of vowel and consonant sounds harmonious with the sentiment which are scattered through Shakespeare’s plays. Its logical rhythm makes an overtone on the metrical beat. Its melody is an idealized form of the natural cadence of emotion. This essential element of verse which appeals to the poetic sense might be overlooked by one who analyzed the metrical form alone. This reservation, that metre does not constitute poetic style in the highest sense, must be held in mind in any examination of the verse of Shakespeare’s plays.

### III. ORDER IN WHICH THE PLAYS WERE WRITTEN

This question is closely connected with that of the change in metrical form alluded to above. It is there-

fore, though historical, related to literary considerations and bears on the development of 'Shakespeare's Mind and Art.' It is settled by several kinds of evidence :—

1. *Internal evidence.* Is the thought and view of life, especially the conception of love, that of a young, ardent poet or that of a mature, reflective man? Is the versification that of the earlier or of the later period of the writer's technical development?

2. *External:* references to or quotations from the play in question in contemporaneous writings whose date can be fixed. The most famous of these is the passage in *Palladis Tamia*, a little book published by Francis Meres in 1598, referring to twelve plays by name and to the Sonnets as in manuscript. The dates of the printing of the quartos and of their entry in the stationers' register for license to print are important, as are a few casual references in diaries and the like.

3. *External-Internal:* that is, when in the play some allusion is made to an historical event whose date is well fixed. Sometimes the allusion is so obscure that no precise inference can be drawn. But in the chorus of *Henry V* the lines,

Were now the general of our gracious empress —  
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,  
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,

fix the date positively between the departure of the Earl of Essex, April 15, 1599, and his return, September 28, 1599. It is rarely, however, that as precise evidence as this can be found. The subject of the succession of the plays is well and succinctly presented in Mr. Dowden's *Shakspere Primer*.

#### IV. SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

The materials bearing on Shakespeare's life were gathered by Halliwell-Phillipps in a large volume en-

titled *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*. They consist of deeds, of casual references to the company of players to which Shakespeare belonged, legal entries of his baptism, his will, and much traditional matter put in print after the Restoration of Charles II, some of which is of doubtful value. The amount of matter is very considerable, and has been so well arranged and digested by Mr. Sidney Lee in his *Life of Shakespeare* that until some new facts are disclosed, which is not impossible, students may be confidently referred to Mr. Lee's book. There are lapses of time during which little or nothing is known of Shakespeare's doings, and no one can say precisely what his private character was, for we have no report of a word he uttered. He seems to have been liked and respected, as far as we can judge, and was not concerned in the personal quarrels of the playwrights.

The following bit of familiar verse by the younger Heywood goes to show that Shakespeare was admitted to easy familiarity with the playwrights of the day as a 'worthy friend and fellow.'

Marlo, renowned for his fair art and wit,  
Could ne'er attain beyond the name of *Kit*,  
Although his *Hero and Leander* did  
Merit addition rather. Famous Kid  
Was called but *Tom*. Tom Watson, though he wrote  
Able to make Apollo's self to dote  
Upon his muse, for all that he could strive  
Yet never could to his full name arrive.  
Tom Nash, in his time of no small esteem,  
Could not a second syllable redeem.  
Excellent Beaumont, in the foremost rank  
Of the rarest wits, was never more than *Frank*.  
*Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose enchanting quill*  
*Commanded mirth or passion, was but Will;*

And famous Jonson, though his learned pen  
Be dipt in Castaly, is still but *Ben*.

Perhaps it is as well that we know little of him except as artist, because his work as artist is of such surpassing interest. It is very difficult to resist the impression that he was personally attractive, and still more difficult to resist the belief that he was well balanced, in spite of his obvious sympathy with human weakness. He possessed or acquired the knack of worldly success. He evidently became a remarkable judge of human nature, able to estimate correctly the value of the different emotions and habits that make up individual natures, and, consequently, was wise in the highest sense. Whether he had the lower wisdom that regulates conduct in accordance with principles is another matter. It is, however, extremely improbable that he ever deviated seriously,—certainly he could not have done so for any extended period,—from a life of sane and well-ordered activity. He remains at once obscure and illustrious.

#### V. LITERARY CRITICISM

The most important branch of Shakespearean Criticism is that which has to do with the artistic value of the plays. This is a subject which has attracted the literary artists of every century succeeding Shakespeare's death. Rational appreciation may be said to begin in England with Coleridge early in the nineteenth century, but unreasoning admiration existed from the appearance of the plays, or at least from the printing of the folio. The dramatic construction or the technical playwright's work is one branch of this department of Shakespearean criticism; the beauty, force, eloquence, and wit of detached passages is another. The true nature of the characters and ex-

planation of their motives has been a fruitful subject, and is the most important one of all. The interpretation of great actors is a not unimportant part of this branch of the subject, for a really great actor has a sympathetic insight into the nature of the character he represents, and in order to give a convincing embodiment must study and reflect on it assiduously and intelligently. Analysis of the leading characters began late in the eighteenth century, and has formed the burden of countless essays and many ponderous volumes. A review of some of the most important writings on this subject will be given in the following chapters.

That æsthetic criticism is the most important branch follows from the fact that art deals with the realities which lie behind facts, and history deals with the facts themselves. Artistic criticism may wander off into all kinds of cloudy rhapsodies, but it is no more apt to err than is historical or scientific criticism, as we may readily see in Fleay's *Shakespeare Manual* and in much of the eighteenth-century disputes over the texts. The textual and historical critics are apt to exult over the æsthetic critics, as if their own department was the only one based on facts and truth. They forget that their study, if of any worth, is important simply because the plays are great poetry. Otherwise, their labors would be of no more value than the hours spent in analyzing the moves of a game of chess. It is the poetry of Shakespeare that gives dignity and worth to Shakespearean scholarship in all branches. The historical and textual scholars are in the habit of referring disparagingly to those who discuss the plays from the artistic standpoint, as 'sign-board critics,' as if they did not care to have beauties pointed out to them. But it is one of the marks of genuine love of beauty to desire expression and sympathy from others. This is part of the radical

unselfishness of the artistic impulse. If a man discovers a beautiful thing, his first and most natural thought is to call some one else to share his admiration. The love of art is rooted in sympathy and communion of spirit, and any one who dislikes to be called to admire a beautiful thing does not care for beauty—at least in that form. Of course the call must come from one in whom the appreciation is genuine. The ‘sign-boards’ must be erected at the cross-roads, and indicate the right road.

#### VI. ORIGIN OF THE PLOTS

Shakespeare invented the plots of *Love's Labour's Lost* and of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. As a rule he dramatized some tradition or current story, sometimes already dramatized, that appealed to Englishmen, or some incidents from English history as it was known to his contemporaries. Some account of the origin and development of the story is usually given in the introductions to modern editions of his work. The fact that he availed himself of current literary matter gives the folk element to his plays—makes them represent the thought of the people of England of his day, and not the whims of some literary clique. His handling of the matter raised it out of the realm of folk literature and gave it universality, while at the same time it preserved the freshness and raciness of folk legend. To follow back the story to its genesis is a matter of special training, nor are the originals easy to get at. We can, however, easily observe how Shakespeare turned the old English prose of Holinshed's history and of North's translation of Plutarch into dignified verse. His historical inaccuracies, as in *Henry IV*, are not of great importance, because he is always true to English human nature. In the case of the play of *Othello* it is interesting to see how magnificently he adorned and elevated the Italian

novel which forms the basis of the plot. The genesis and development of *Hamlet* can be studied to advantage, since the English translation of the Norse tale and the first quarto are given in full in the second volume of Dr. Furness's edition. A very useful compendium of the stories, or, at least, a reference to the originals, is given in Dowden's *Shakspere Primer*.

#### VII. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA

The development of the Elizabethan drama and its position in the social life of London, and the tone and character of Renaissance society, are special subjects indirectly bearing on a comprehension of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. Symond's *Shakespere's Predecessors*, Ward's *History of English Dramatic Literature*, and Sidney Lee's *Shakespeare's Life and Work* throw considerable light on a subject, to approach which intelligently we must discard most of our ideas about modern cities and the modern theatre and form a conception of the sixteenth-century London. We usually form our notions of the period from the plays themselves, and are apt to give a romantic tinge to an environment that must have had its commonplace, everyday features, like any other years of this working-day world, though its dramatic expression was so highly imaginative. We should remember that, though the poet was for all time, the plays were written for his age. When we consider, too, that the plays were written for a certain kind of stage, their astonishing vitality is more evident to us, for they alone do not grow 'old-fashioned,' and are still eminently playable, though not in the least mechanically adapted to the methods of modern acting. The criticism we wish to review usually considers them as detached specimens of beautiful literature existing in an ideal world rather than as practically actable plays. They

are both, and some knowledge of the stage and the audience and of the dramas preceding 1600 puts them in a truer relation to the humanity of their age and of ours. Such knowledge is difficult to acquire, for it demands imaginative power. It cannot be acquired *en bloc* simply by diligence in learning facts. It may be regarded as, if not a major department of Shakespearean criticism, at least as a very useful minor.

#### VII. THE DOUBTFUL PLAYS AND QUESTIONS OF DIVIDED AUTHORSHIP

There are a number of plays, like the *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Pericles*, in which Shakespeare aided another writer or another writer aided him. The determination of the respective parts is a matter of great delicacy, and is effected by consideration of style—largely by the percentages of eleven-syllable lines and run-on lines in the different portions. This very difficult question is then decided by the extension of the methods already alluded to, but forms no part of our general subject.

## CHAPTER II

### CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND UP TO THE RESTORATION

SHAKESPEARE came to London to live in the year 1585 or 1586. His three children were all born before the earlier date. There is no record that he revisited Stratford before 1596. He left London and returned to his native village as a permanent home about 1611. In the interval he had written thirty-one plays and helped in the composition or writing of five or six others,—had written two poems of considerable length and one hundred and fifty-six sonnets. He is first alluded to by the playwright, Robert Greene (who died in September, 1592) in rather an ill-natured way, in a pamphlet entitled, ‘A Groat’s Worth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance,’ which shows at least that he was attracting attention as a writer. That the tone of this reference was resented by some of his friends is proved by some apologetic words penned by Henry Chettle in December of the same year, in the preface to another pamphlet. Chettle says that he is sorry that he did not moderate the expressions in the original pamphlet, which he edited, as he ‘might easily have done,’ because ‘divers of worship,’ *i. e.*, several people of worth, have told him, what he had noticed himself, that the man in question was ‘civil in his demeanor and excellent in the quality he professes.’ That Shakespeare is the man alluded to as an ‘upstart crow’ in the original pamphlet is evident from the fact that Greene says, ‘he is, in his owne conceit, the only *Shakescene* in the countrie.’ Greene was of course jealous of him as a young writer, but Chettle

alludes only to his ‘excellence in his qualitie,’ that is, acting. At this date, however, he had done nothing more than to help in rewriting three parts of *Henry VI*, which came out in March, 1592. *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, probably his first complete play, may have been written, but in the expression ‘bumbast out a blank verse as well as the best of you’ Greene evidently refers to a historical play and not a graceful comedy, nor does it seem probable that the expression refers simply to acting. There is, however, in this reference to Shakespeare’s early work no hint of literary criticism. We can gather from it, however, that Shakespeare had begun to write, and that his work was good enough to arouse the jealousy of older men.

The next six years was a period of great activity and rapidly rising success, for in 1597 the young man, though but thirty-three, was able to buy a large house in Stratford. In 1598 Francis Meres brought out a little book entitled *Palladis Tamia*, in which is the famous reference to the dramatist-poet.

The English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent abiliments by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shakespeare, Marlow, and Chapman.

As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweete, wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare; witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his Sugred Sonnets among his private friends.

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latines, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness, his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, his *Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy, his *Richard the Second*,

*Richard the Third, Henry the Fourth, King John, Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

As Epius Stolo said the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue, if they would speak Latin ; so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase if they would speak English.

We gather from the above, and from the seventeen other contemporary references to Shakespeare given in Halliwell's *Outlines*, that the popular reputation of the poet was as great in his lifetime as at any subsequent period, not only among playgoers but among lovers of poetry. Among scholars and among the literary people he was apparently not held in as high estimation as he has been since the seventeenth century. A popular reputation is usually ephemeral, but in the cases of Shakespeare and Bunyan it has proved lasting. A contemporary reputation among writers and scholars is achieved by good work, but it must be good work in the conventional fashion. They are more shy of new methods than are those who read or look at a play for the sake of being touched or amused. In the seventeenth century the Latin and Greek authors were recognized as models. The authority of the Latin language was very great. It had been the recognized medium for jurists and philosophers and publicists for a thousand years. Its acquirement was the centre of education. The study of Greek was introduced into English universities late in the sixteenth century, and the beauties of Greek literature made a great impression on receptive minds, and it, too, soon was regarded as authoritative on points of literary art. Men are very apt to overestimate the value of what they painfully acquired in youth, much as persons to-day plume themselves on their accurate spelling of English words. Phrases in a foreign language have a peculiar flavor of

depth and mystery. For this reason Matthew Arnold quotes in his criticism some Latin phrases as if of ultimate poetic perfection, and the men of Shakespeare's day used Latin quotations as if the words held peculiar virtue. As a rule, too, evil spirits paid little attention to adjurations unless couched in sonorous Latin. The Latin and Greek authors were regarded as a race apart from and above English writers. The rules for correctness and excellence were to be drawn from their practice, and there has been a tendency down to the last decade of the nineteenth century to deduce even grammatical rules for English speech from their writings, sometimes from the most rhetorical of Latin authors.

The rules which Aristotle deduced from an examination of Greek Tragedies were therefore regarded as laws for English tragedy. Shakespeare rarely pays any attention to these rules. Consequently, for a long time, down to the nineteenth century, he was considered 'irregular.' The attraction of his plays was admitted, indeed, it forced itself on men's attention every time a really competent actor personated one of his characters. The force, wit, and eloquence of detached passages could not be denied. This was attributed to inspiration, but his dramatic construction was considered all wrong because he did not regard the 'unities.' We shall see hereafter how, in spite of English good sense, this view recurs in the criticism of the eighteenth century.

The most important critical expressions of Shakespeare's contemporaries after his death are to be found in the eulogistic verses prefixed to the folio editions of the seventeenth century. The First Folio of 1623 Mr. Lee considers to have consisted of five hundred copies, judging from the number now existing. Even then doubtless many quarto pamphlets containing single

plays were in existence and could be procured by those desirous of reading the plays, and many of what are known as 'players' quartos,' published after the printing of the First Folio, in 1623. These last of course are of no authority in settling disputed points in the text, since they must be copies of earlier publications, and in printing them no particular attention was paid to correctness, certainly no effort was made for improvement. But the fact that only four editions for readers, amounting in all probably to not more than three thousand five hundred copies, were printed till the six-volume edition of Rowe, in 1709, shows that outside of the public representations few persons could have had an opportunity of knowing the plays. The fact, too, that twenty-four years (1685–1709) elapsed between the printing of the Fourth Folio and the first popular edition shows that Shakespeare as an author was not accessible to the general public. During the entire seventeenth century fewer copies were sold than the present yearly demand. This fact would go to show that, for a considerable period, love for Shakespeare was confined to readers of some special powers of poetic appreciation. At the same time the number of times the plays were represented after the Restoration, from 1660 to 1709, shows that his hold on audiences was interrupted but briefly, and then not by change in taste, but by outside circumstances.

Samuel Pepys, whose diary runs from 1660 to 1669, was present at the representation of twelve plays of Shakespeare. He saw *Hamlet* four times and *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* many times. As his diary was in shorthand and in no way addressed to the public, it is absolutely unbiased. Furthermore, as he was a man destitute of poetic insight, his criticisms are valuable as representing the views of the average playgoer, and

will be referred to hereafter. For the present we note that the acting qualities of the plays insured their continuous public presentation, even when it was hard to buy the ‘book of the play.’ The literary critics were in time forced to recognize them, and after a century or so discovered their great literary qualities and began reluctantly to admit that the ‘rules’ were not of absolute validity.

The eulogistic verses in the folios must of course be interpreted as obituary notices, in which praise is awarded without much discrimination. Prefixed to editions of the plays they do not refer to ‘the back or second, that might hold if this should blast in proof,’ — the claim to the title of poet based on the poems and sonnets. But Ben Jonson’s verses have a hearty ring, and his conviction that Shakespeare was a great poet shines through the exaggerated language of post-mortem encomium. He says,—

Triumph, my Britain ! thou hast one to show  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.

Although the verses are so familiar, it is as well to transcribe them, as the first authoritative statement of Shakespeare’s greatness.

### COMMENDATORY VERSES

PREFIXED TO THE FOLIO OF 1623

*To the memory of my beloved, the Author, Master WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE, and what he hath left us.*

To draw no envy, Shakespeare, on thy name,  
Am I thus ample to thy book and fame ;  
While I confess thy writings to be such  
As neither man nor Muse can praise too much :  
'T is true, and all men's suffrage. But these ways  
Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise ;

For silliest ignorance on these may light,  
Which, when it sounds at best, but echoes right ;  
Or blind affection, which doth ne'er advance  
The truth, but gropes, and urgeth all by chance ;  
Or crafty malice might pretend this praise,  
And think to ruin where it seem'd to raise :  
These are as some infamous bawd or whore  
Should praise a matron : what could hurt her more ?  
But thou art proof against them ; and, indeed,  
Above th' ill fortune of them or the need.  
I, therefore, will begin : Soul of the age,  
Th' applause, delight, the wonder of our stage,  
My Shakespeare, rise ! I will not lodge thee by  
Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie  
A little further, to make thee a room :  
Thou art a monument without a tomb,  
And art alive still, while thy book doth live,  
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.  
That I not mix thee so, my brain excuses,—  
I mean, with great but disproportion'd Muses ;  
For, if I thought my judgment were of years,  
I should commit thee surely with thy peers,  
And tell how far thou didst our Lylly outshine,  
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line :  
And, though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek,  
From thence to honour thee I would not seek  
For names ; but call forth thundering Æschylus,  
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,  
Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova, dead,  
To life again, to hear thy buskin tread  
And shake a stage ; or, when thy socks were on,  
Leave thee alone for the comparison  
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome  
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.—  
Triumph, my Britain ! thou hast one to show,  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age, but for all time ;  
And all the Muses still were in their prime,

When, like Apollo, he came forth to warm  
 Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm.  
 Nature herself was proud of his designs,  
 And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines ;  
 Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,  
 As since she will vouchsafe no other wit :  
 The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,  
 Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please ;  
 But antiquated and deserted lie,  
 As they were not of Nature's family. —  
 Yet must I not give Nature all ; thy art,  
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part :  
 For, though the poet's matter Nature be,  
 His art doth give the fashion ; and that he  
 Who casts to write a living line must sweat, —  
 Such as thine are, — and strike the second heat  
 Upon the Muses' anvil ; turn the same,  
 And himself with it, that he thinks to frame ;  
 Or, for the laurel, he may gain a scorn, —  
 For a good poet 's made, as well as born :  
 And such wert thou. — Look how the father's face  
 Lives in his issue ; even so the race  
 Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines  
 In his well-turned and true-filed lines ;  
 In each of which he seems to shake a lance,  
 As brandish'd at the eyes of ignorance. —  
 Sweet Swan of Avon, what a sight it were  
 To see thee in our waters yet appear,  
 And make those flights upon the banks of Thames  
 That so did take Eliza and our James !  
 But stay ; I see thee in the hemisphere  
 Advanced, and made a constellation there :  
 Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage  
 Or influence chide or cheer the drooping stage ;  
 Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourn'd like  
 night,  
 And despairs day, but for thy volume's light.

BEN JONSON.

The testimony to the author's literary craftsmanship is explicit when he writes :—

His lines

Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,  
As since she [Nature] will vouchsafe no other wit.

He gives him credit for natural powers and technical skill both :—

Yet must I not give Nature all ; thy art,  
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.

He speaks of his 'well-turned and true-filed lines' which is not altogether a just characterization of Shakespeare's later work, — *Cymbeline*, for example, — where the emotion and idea seem almost too much for the line, and strain the words as if to tear them apart, occasionally striking out a great phrase where music and idea meet in a harmony far beyond the grace of 'well-filed lines.' But the poem is a noble tribute to friend, dramatist, and poet.

Leonard Digges, a university man, contributed twenty-two lines to the first folio, claiming immortality for the plays. He speaks of his 'wit-fraught book,' — wit, signifying thought. Both in these verses and in a longer poem introducing an edition of the poems (1640) he speaks of the acting quality of the plays, which were so much more acceptable than the *Fox* or *Alchemist* of Ben Jonson. In the first one he says :—

Impossible with some new strain to outdo  
Passions of Juliet and her Romeo,  
Or till I hear a scene more nobly take  
Than when thy half-sword-parleying Romans spake.

'Half-sword-parleying Romans' applies admirably to the dialogue between Brutus and Cassius.

In the preface to the 1640 edition of the poems, the

writer says of them : ‘ You shall find them severe, clear, and elegantly plaine, such gentle straines as shall re-create and not perplex your braine, no intricate or cloudy stiffe to puzzle intellect, but perfect eloquence.’ As the sonnets, many of which are the most suggestive and profound poetry in the world, make up the major part of the volume and certainly ‘ perplex the braine ’ of the reader as to how far they are based on real experience,— a question never to be settled,— our trust in seventeenth-century prefaces is considerably shaken by this offhand utterance. It would be interesting to know how he gathers a ‘ severe, clear, and elegantly plaine ’ meaning out of Sonnets 121 and 125.

John Milton’s first public appearance in print was made by sixteen verses in the Second Folio, 1632, he being then in his twenty-seventh year. It contains the well-known line :—

Dear Son of memory, great heir of fame,  
but he, too, speaks of Shakespeare’s ‘ easy numbers  
which flow to the shame of slow, endeavoring art,’ as if  
he were more struck with the natural grace of Shake-  
speare’s verse than with the power and justness of his  
thought. But he speaks, too, of ‘ the unvalued book ’  
and the ‘ Delphic lines.’

A year or two later, in *L’Allegro*, he writes :—

If . . . . .  
Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy’s child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild,

and makes Ben Jonson the exemplar of English tragedy. It would seem from this that he did not appreciate the epic grandeur of *Macbeth* or the tragic pathos of Desdemona and Cordelia. But the reference need not be taken too seriously. He needed to refer to a dignified, stately play and to a charming pastoral comedy ; possibly he

had *Midsummer Night's Dream* in mind, and naturally thought of Jonson and Shakespeare. But undoubtedly, like most of his learned contemporaries, he failed entirely to appreciate the nature and quality of Shakespeare's genius. For in *Il Penseroso* he says of serious plays :—

And what, though rare, of later age,  
Ennobled hath the buskined stage.

*Lear* and *Macbeth* evidently had not made much impression on him, or he would not have passed by English tragedy with such slighting mention.

In this Second Folio (1632), however, appeared a copy of verses signed I. M. S., initials which Mr. Singer supposes to stand for the last name of Richard James. These, too, must be transcribed in full, not only as an admirable specimen of overflow deca-syllabics, but as the first acknowledgment of one of the chiefest of Shakespeare's powers, his ability to make a character real :—

A mind reflecting ages past, whose clear  
And equal surface can make things appear,—  
Distant a thousand years,— and represent  
Them in their lively colours, just extent:  
To outrun hasty Time, retrieve the Fates,  
Roll back the heavens, blow ope the iron gates  
Of Death and Lethe, where confused lie  
Great heaps of ruinous mortality:  
In that deep, dusky dungeon to discern  
A royal ghost from churls; by art to learn  
The physiognomy of shades, and give  
Them sudden birth, wondering how oft they live;  
What story coldly tells, what poets feign  
At second hand, and picture without brain,—  
Senseless and soulless shows,— to give a stage—  
Ample and true with life,— voice, action, age,

As Plato's year, and new scene of the world,  
Them unto us, or us to them had hurl'd :  
To raise our ancient sovereigns from their hearse,  
Made kings his subjects ; by exchanging verse  
Enlive their pale trunks, that the present age  
Joys in their joy, and trembles at their rage ;  
Yet so to temper passion, that our ears  
Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears  
Both weep and smile ; fearful at plots so sad,  
Then laughing at our fear ; abused, and glad  
To be abused ; affected with that truth  
Which we perceive is false, pleased in that ruth  
At which we start, and by elaborate play  
Tortured and tickled ; by a crab-like way  
Time past made pastime, and in ugly sort  
Disgorging up his ravin for our sport :—  
While the plebeian imp, from lofty throne,  
Creates and rules a world, and works upon  
Mankind by secret engines ; now to move  
A chilling pity, then a rigorous love ;  
To strike up and stroke down both joy and ire ;  
To stir th' affections ; and by heavenly fire  
Mould us anew, stol'n from ourselves :—  
This, and much more which cannot be express'd  
But by himself, his tongue, and his own breast,  
Was Shakespeare's freehold ; which his cunning  
brain  
Improved by favour of the nine-fold train ;  
The buskin'd Muse, the comic queen, the grand  
And louder tone of Clio, nimble hand  
And nimbler foot of the melodious pair,  
The silver-voiced lady, the most fair  
Calliope, whose speaking silence daunts,  
And she whose praise the heavenly body chants ;  
These jointly woo'd him, envying one another, —  
Obey'd by all as spouse, but loved as brother, —  
And wrought a curious robe, of sable grave,  
Fresh green, and pleasant yellow, red most brave,

And constant blue, rich purple, guiltless white,  
The lowest russet, and the scarlet bright ;  
Branch'd and embroider'd like the painted Spring ;  
Each leaf match'd with a flower, and each string  
Of golden wire, each line of silk ; there run  
Italian works, whose thread the sisters spun ;  
And there did sing, or seem to sing, the choice  
Birds of a foreign note and various voice ;  
Here hangs a mossy rock ; there plays a fair  
But chiding fountain, purled ; not the air,  
Nor clouds nor thunder, but were living drawn, —  
Not out of common tiffany or lawn,  
But fine materials, which the Muses know,  
And only know the countries where they grow.  
Now, when they could no longer him enjoy  
In mortal garments pent, — ‘Death may destroy,’  
They say, ‘his body ; but his verse shall live,  
And more than Nature takes our hands shall give ;  
In a less volume, but more strongly bound,  
Shakespeare shall breathe and speak ; with laurel  
crown'd  
Which never fades ; fed with ambrosian meat.’  
So with this robe they clothe him, bid him wear it ;  
For time shall never stain nor envy tear it.

The writer apparently is thinking of Henry IV, Richard III, and the other Shakespearean kings; possibly, too, of the Roman plays. He says it was ‘Shakespeare’s freehold to give shades’ sudden birth — a stage ample and true with life, voice, action, age,’ as if they had come back to play their parts in the revolution of Plato’s year; that the artist, standing outside his work, ‘creates and rules a world.’ It is a ‘world,’ not a nebulous chaos, in which his figures move, an ordered world where law reigns and men act from motives and character, because its creator rules it. The characters live, and move

A chilling pity, then a rigorous love . . .  
 The present age  
 Joys in their joy, and trembles at their rage.

Is he thinking of Othello? At all events, he touches the point with a needle. Shakespeare's characters have the attributes of living men and women. And I. M. S. enunciates for the first time—to be forgotten for a century and rediscovered by Coleridge—the main principle of Shakespearean criticism. He calls the author a 'plebeian imp,'<sup>1</sup> but at least he puts him on a 'lofty throne,' and we must take it that the playwright is 'plebeian' compared to the royal ghosts he marshals, for compared to the living princes, James I and his sons, he is an aristocrat. But it is hard to forgive I. M. S. for the adjective. Perhaps he could not hit on any other epithet to fill out his line. His assertion that Shakespeare 'by heavenly fire moulds us anew, stolen from ourselves,' is almost as true of the effect of a tragedy as Aristotle's phrase, 'purge our affections through pity and terror.' I. M. S. not only loved Shakespeare's plays, but he could give some reason for the faith that was in him, and his words are true dramatic criticism.

In the *Centurie of Prayse*, published by the New Shakespearean Society, are collected all the casual references to the dramatist in the hundred years following his death. They are almost universally commendatory, but none of them show appreciation of the true greatness of the author. The adjectives: 'honey-tongued,' 'sweet,' 'mellifluous,' 'honey-flowing,' 'gentle,' 'silver-tongued,' 'enchanting quill,' 'sugred dainties,' and the like, show that the writers as a rule had not got much

<sup>1</sup> There is nothing derogatory in the term 'imp,' which did not mean at that time a puny devil of low social standing. There were then 'imps of light' as well as 'imps of darkness.' But 'plebeian' provokes at least the counter-check quarrelsome.

beyond the most superficial view of the plays, and did not feel much more than the harmony of certain passages. It is not till 1640 that a more broad-minded critic calls him 'lofty,' and till 1653 that another calls him 'most rich in humors.' The numerous passages, about seventy-five, from writings before Shakespeare's death, in which some of his characters or situations are plainly alluded to, or some striking lines parodied, show distinctly that the writers assumed that readers were familiar with the plays. Shakespeare's position in the latter part of his life seems to have been not unlike that of Dickens in 1860, when everybody referred to his characters as common acquaintances and the literary and learned world had not begun to discuss the question whether he was an artist or not. Among the characters, Richard III, Falstaff, and Justice Shallow are the most frequently mentioned. In fact, they quoted Shakespeare just as we now quote Kipling, familiarly, and with no thought of the critics.

Beaumont and Fletcher, in their amusing burlesque, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, quote Hotspur's words in *Henry IV*, Part 1, as follows: —

By Heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,  
Or dive into the bottom of the sea,  
And pluck up drowned honour from the lake of hell.

The original runs: —

By Heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,  
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,  
Where fathom line could never touch the ground,  
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.

The quotation is evidently made from memory, and with full confidence that it would be at once recognized

by the audience. Such offhand reference is the highest tribute to the popularity of the original.

In a play, *Return from Parnassus*, 1601, written by a student for the Christmas festivities at Cambridge, the actors Kempe and Burbage appear as *dramatis personæ*. Kempe says:—

‘Few of the Universities pen plays well, they smell too much of Ovid and that writer Metamorphosis and talk too much of Proserpina and Jupiter. Why, here’s our fellow Shakespeare puts them all downe,—ay, and Ben Jonson too.’

This, too, goes to establish the fact that the plays were popular, of which, indeed, there was never any question; or if any, it was answered at once when the plays were put on the stage, and ‘all was so pestered you scarce shall have a roome,’ when Ben Jonson’s *Fox* or *Alchemist* scarcely paid for heating the hall.

Oh, how the audience  
Were ravished ; with what wonder went they thence,  
When some new day they would not brook a line  
Of tedious (though well-labored) *Cataline* ;  
*Sejanus*, too, was irksome ; they prized more  
Honest Iago or the jealous Moore.  
And though the *Fox* and Subtile *Alchemist*,  
Long intermitted, could not quite be mist,  
Yet these sometimes even at a friend’s desire  
Acted, have scarce defraided the seacoale fire  
And dore-keepers : when, let but Falstaffe come,  
Hall, Poines, the rest, — You scarce shall have a roome  
All is so pestered.

(LEONARD DIGGES, in Shakespeare’s ‘Poems,’ printed 1640.)

One of the charges brought against Shakespeare by the academic critics of succeeding generations was lack of taste in bringing comic scenes in juxtaposition to

tragic scenes. We find no mention of this till after the Restoration. One very absurd person of the earlier period, named William Cartwright, charges him with coarseness and vulgarity. We are quite willing to admit that Shakespeare's unrefined people do use very unrefined language, and that sometimes, especially in his earlier plays, his gentlemen make allusive remarks of an unpleasant character, though the tone of the plays is sound and the view of life they present true and pure. The versifier in question destroys any weight that his words might have by asserting that Fletcher was blameless in a quality where Shakespeare was reprehensible. His verses run, or rather limp, as follows : —

Shakespeare to thee was dull, whose best jest lies  
In the Ladies' questions and the Foole's replies ;  
Old fashioned wit which walked from town to town  
In turned hose which our fathers called the clown,  
Whose wit our nice times would obsceanness call ;  
And which made bawdry pass for comical,  
Nature was thy art, thy veine was free  
As his, but without his scurrillity.

At such stuff we glance and pass. The beginning of another question which agitated the critical world profoundly may be discerned in these notices before the Restoration, and that is, were Shakespeare's plays outside of the category of great art because he did not observe the unities, and did not form himself on classical models ? Just after Shakespeare's death, and before the publication of the First Folio, Ben Jonson visited Drummond of Hawthornden, near Edinburgh. His host took some notes of the conversation, and reports Jonson as saying of Shakespeare that 'he wanted art.' As Professor Lounsbury says, Jonson must have referred to Shakespeare's disregard of the unities, for he must have been fully sensible of Shakespeare's mastery of the art

of versifying, to which indeed he bears emphatic testimony in his prefatory verses. Shirley, one of the later dramatists, speaks of

Wise Jonson at whose name art did bow.

The writer of the preface to the poems — 1640 — says that Shakespeare was

The patterne of all wit,  
*Art without art* unparalleled as yet.

Milton said (1630) :—

While to the shame of slow-endeavoring art  
Thy easy numbers flow —

and his lines —

Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild,

carry much the same idea, — that the poet was a natural genius, a sort of *lusus naturæ* writing fine poetry without knowing what he was doing. This notion, which does violence to the true conception of the artist, keeps cropping up continually during the next century.

A passage in the life of Shakespeare, in one of the early editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, by De Quincey, has contributed to establish the idea that Milton rather looked down on Shakespeare as an unscholarly person, and reproached Charles I in (*Eikonoklastes*) for making his plays his ‘closet companion.’ Milton’s language does not justify such an impression. He says that a ‘tyrant may use pious and gentle language,’ and by inference that the prayers and religious musings attributed to the king are no proof that he was not a tyrant. To prove this he will cite, he says, ‘not an abstruse author, wherein the king might be less conversant, but one whom we know was the closet companion of his solitude, William Shakespeare, who intro-

duces the person of Richard III, speaking in as high a strain of piety and mortification as is uttered in any passage of this book' (*Eikon Basilike*). Milton does not reproach the king with reading Shakespeare, but implies that he may be no more really pious than Richard III. This is no proof that Milton admired Shakespeare, but merely shows that he was more or less familiar with the play of *Richard III*, which had not been acted for many years.

The following may bear distantly on the question, did Milton appreciate Shakespeare? Edward Phillips (1630–1676), the nephew whom Milton educated and with whom he was on terms of affectionate intimacy, published the *Theatrum Poetarum* the year after his uncle's death (1675). In it he gives short notes on the Elizabethan dramatists: 'Christopher Marlowe,' he says, 'was a kind of second Shakespeare, because like him he rose from an actor to be a maker of plays, though inferior both in fame and merit, and because in his begun poem of *Hero and Leander* he seems to have a resemblance to that clean and unsophisticated wit which is natural to that incomparable poet.'

He holds Shakespeare far superior to the rest.

William Shakespeare, the glory of the English stage; whose nativity at Stratford upon Avon is the highest honour that town can boast of; from an actor of tragedies and comedies, he became a maker; and such a maker that though some others may pretend to a more exact decorum and economy, especially in tragedy, never any expressed a more lofty and tragic height, never any represented nature more freely to the life; and when the polishments of art are most wanting he pleaseth with a certain wild and native elegance, and in all his writings hath an unvulgar style, as well in his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Rape of Lucrece*, and other various poems as in his dramatics.

The writer sets Shakespeare above all his contemporary playwrights. In his preface he says that —

Wit, ingenuity, and learning in verse, even elegancy itself, though it comes nearest, are one thing ; true, native poetry is another, — nay, though all the laws of heroic poem, all the laws of tragedy, were exactly observed, yet still this *tour entregent* — this poetic energy, if I may so call it, would be required to give life to all the rest. . . . Shakespeare, in spite of all his unfiled expressions, his rambling and undigested fancies, the laughter of the critical, yet must be confessed a poet above many that go beyond him in literature many degrees.

We have no warrant in saying that Mr. Phillips was reflecting the judgment of his honored uncle, but it is a conjecture as plausible as many we find in critical writings. The last quotation especially is just about what we may suppose Milton would have said when he had finished *Samson Agonistes* in exact accordance with ‘the laws of tragedy.’

The absence of any reasoned criticism of the plays during the first half of the seventeenth century is less remarkable than the fact that so many writers ignore Shakespeare’s existence entirely. We should hardly expect Bishop Hooker or Francis Bacon to show by quotation that they were familiar with works a line or two from which would have illustrated the finer distinctions of their subjects and have cast a deathless light on their pages, or to discover that, in their homely English tongue, plays, written by an uneducated actor, were being presented which were in the same category as the *Agamemnon* or the *Prometheus*. One was too professional, and the other too aristocratic. But it does seem remarkable that Walter Raleigh, a poet and a man of the active world, sympathizing, too, with all popular interests, should show no trace of familiarity

with the words or story of plays he undoubtedly witnessed many times. Daniel and Warner, the heavy poets of the day, do not allude to their great contemporary, though it is stated that Shakespeare was intimate with Drayton. A remarkable example of this neglect is afforded by the poet, preacher, scholar, Dr. John Donne. He was born in 1573 and died in 1631, and consequently was at the height of his impressionable and enthusiastic youth when Shakespeare's most brilliant comedies and greatest tragedies were first acted or published. He was a friend and admirer of Ben Jonson, a fine scholar and a verse-writer of some remarkable qualities. He took orders in 1614, and became a very eloquent and forcible preacher. He is precisely the man we should expect to be an enthusiastic admirer of the plays,—were he living now he would be a Shakespearean critic of the first order,—and yet in his voluminous correspondence, much of which is on literary topics, he never mentions the name of the first dramatist of his day. It is evident that Shakespeare's position in the literary world was entirely different from what it is now, and that, owing perhaps to the fact that he was not a university man or to the fact that he was an actor, he was never received in the literary world the first half of the seventeenth century on a footing commensurate with his real value. He was, as said before, recognized as a writer of very popular, amusing, and effective plays. How great an achievement this is was perhaps not understood, at all events he was usually spoken of as ‘honey-tongued,’ ‘mellifluous,’ ‘sweet,’ and the like epithets which, though true in a sense, are so inadequate as to be exasperating. Here and there he found more intelligent admirers, but his excellence was so different from that of the classic authors that a century or two was necessary before men could adjust their

ideas to a new literary phenomenon. The attitude of the professional contemporary world was only the usual attitude of professional literature towards the new,— conservatism compounded with non-comprehending indifference. Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley were received with even more slighting indifference by the literary world in what was called a more enlightened age.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM THE RESTORATION TO 1710

ALTHOUGH the object of this book is to follow the development of the criticism of Shakespeare as a literary artist, the criticism of him as a dramatist is so closely bound up with purely æsthetic appreciation that the two cannot be separated. He was primarily a writer of plays for public presentation, though it would make very little difference in the estimation in which he is held at present if none of his plays were shown on the stage. But in the latter part of the seventeenth century printed copies were comparatively rare, and the favor of the public was given to the plays because they were seen, not because they were read. It was natural that they should be judged by critics by technical rules drawn from the practice of the ancients rather than by their own essential qualities. These rules were: first, a properly constructed drama should observe the three unities; second, a properly constructed tragedy should be elevated in tone and language, and the hero should pose as a person of social importance and never be shown in an undignified or ludicrous position; third, a tragedy should be pure, that is, comic scenes should never be shown in the same play with tragic ones; fourth, scenes of bloodshed and brutal violence should never be exhibited on the stage. It is evident that Shakespeare violated these rules whenever they were violated in the fable he was dramatizing. In consequence he was accused of lacking in literary art, even by men who admitted that his plays possessed the charm which it is the privilege of literary art alone to exert.

The first rule, that the unities must be observed, is based on the authority of Aristotle. It is not to be wondered at that Aristotle was regarded with almost superstitions reverence in the seventeenth century. Those who read his *Poetics* were introduced for the first time to literary criticism of the highest order. The lofty view he takes of the drama as a noble and serious form of art could not fail to make a profound impression on his readers. When they read the Greek plays on which his criticism is founded they could not be insensible to their heroic dignity. His traditional reputation was reinforced by his evident merit. Naturally, his works became a literary bible of unquestioned authority, and his words were taken as applicable to tragedy in the abstract, not merely to tragedy as developed in Greece two thousand years ago. Indeed, there is so much that is universally true in his criticism that it was natural to take what he says as applicable to all dramatic construction.

Speaking of the distinction between Epic narration and Tragedy he says, ‘They differ in that Epic poetry admits but one kind of metre and is narrative in form. They differ again in the length of the action, for Tragedy endeavors *as far as possible* to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun or but slightly to exceed this limit.’

On this sentence is founded the rule of ‘Unity of time.’ Corneille, writing in 1656, *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du Poème Dramatique*, says:—

These words have given ground to the famous discussion whether they should be understood as referring to a solar day of twenty-four hours or to the artificial day of twelve; there are many partizans of each opinion. For my part I find so many plots difficult to complete in so short a period, that, not only should I give them twenty-four whole hours, but I

should avail myself of the permission of the philosopher to take a few more and extend the plot without scruple even to thirty.

There is a maxim of law that indulgence may be increased and restrictions lessened, and I notice that an author is frequently hampered by this rule, which forced some of the ancients to take impossibilities for granted. Euripides in the *Suppliants* makes Theseus leave Athens with his army, fight a battle before the walls of Thebes, some twelve or fifteen leagues distant, and return a victor in the next act. During the interval between his departure and the arrival of the messenger with news of the victory, Æthra and the chorus declaim thirty-six verses. Certainly he employed the time well. Again, Æschylus makes Agamemnon return from Troy still more rapidly. He had arranged with his wife, Clytemnestra, that as soon as the city was captured he would let her know by beacon-fires on the mountain tops, of which the second should be lighted as soon as the flare of the first was seen and so on from mountain to mountain, so that she should learn the news before morning. But as soon as she has learned by the last bonfire that Troy has fallen, Agamemnon appears. His ship, though battered by a tempest, came as quickly as the light could travel from one bonfire to another.

Many critics have argued against this rule and called it arbitrary, and they would be right were it not based on the authority of Aristotle. But they ought to bow to it for a very natural reason. A dramatique poem is an imitation, or rather a picture, of human action, and certainly portraits are the better the more closely they resemble their originals. The representation lasts two hours, and would exactly represent the action if that also covered not more than two hours. We should then not limit ourselves to an action of not more than twenty-four hours or not more than twelve in duration, but to one as short as possible that it may be an exact picture.

The language of the great French tragedian shows

the almost superstitious regard paid to the Greek critic in France. Englishmen were by nature more independent of authority, and disposed to defend their national playwright, whose dramas they witnessed with never-failing pleasure, but the scholarly critics among them were apt to think that the ancients had set models of excellence which it was almost impious to decry. A modification of the rule which seems more reasonable was that the time, even if over twenty-four hours, should be all accounted for; there should be no gaps in which the hero, like Hamlet, was brooding in quiescence, or a cause was slowly gathering strength before its effect appeared in a deed, or a character was developing or deteriorating, like Macbeth's. But it is evident that, however the rule be modified or interpreted, Shakespeare paid no attention to it. The time supposed to elapse from the first to the last scene in his tragedies is long enough for the action to develop, whether a week or three months is necessary.

From the rule for few hours, or consecutive hours, whichever be taken, the rule for unity of place was deduced. If the scenes represented are in distant countries, and some of the actors, as is evidently necessary, appear in both places, a longer time than one day would be required to transport them from place to place. This requires that the scene be restricted to a city and the neighboring country, or to a palace and the adjacent garden. Shakespeare rarely observes this rule, even in his comedies, but transports Rosalind and her cousin and Touchstone to the forest of Arden, a journey at least long enough to weary them. Lear is carried from Leicester to Dover, Othello and Desdemona sail from Venice to Cyprus, between two acts. In none of these can it be said that the violation of the unities of time and place detracts in the least from the interest

or the artistic propriety of the drama.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it was made the ground of adverse criticism of the plays during the eighteenth century, and only feebly defended by men like Samuel Johnson and Pope on the ground that Shakespeare was ignorant of the rules and must therefore be excused. None went so far as to inquire what a tragic story proper for representation really is, or to note that only when, as in Greece, the audience was thoroughly familiar with the story and the characters, the representation of the catastrophe, taking place as it does on the long-expected day, may be sufficient material for a play. But great tragic situations are results from slow-gathering causes, and if the audience are not familiar with the antecedents it is necessary to make them so, and this can be effectually done only by representation. If narration is used, except very sparingly, the interest drops, for the essence of a drama is action. Therefore, the representation must assume time enough for the story to develop. The Greek tragedy is exceptional and can furnish no general rule, because the audience knew all about the Atridæ and the princes of Thebes beforehand, and needed only a few poetical allusions to lead up to the catastrophe. Again the lyric element as represented by the chorus is as important as the dialogue. It is therefore impossible to apply the rules of the classic drama to the English drama, except in the most general way. But it was necessary that a century or so should elapse before critics would admit this common-sense conclusion.

The third rule, the unity of action, is of a different

<sup>1</sup> The unities of time and place apply to a tragedy, since it is tragedy that Aristotle is discussing. In a comedy when the plot is an intrigue the time is usually short enough to satisfy the most exacting advocate of the rules.

character and does not apply to mechanical form, but to the construction of the plot or story. This is, of course, a matter of infinitely more consequence, and involves artistic considerations. A building need not be restricted to a particular height or length, but its parts must harmonize and effect a unified impression. The words of Aristotle on this subject are :—

Now, according to our definition, Tragedy is an imitation<sup>1</sup> of an action that is complete and whole and of a certain magnitude ; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot must therefore neither begin nor end at haphazard, but must conform to these principles.

That is as true as it is elemental. The action of a tragedy is a series of concatenated events leading up to a catastrophe. Those events are linked together, partly by chance, but for the most part they are caused in the Shakespearean tragedy by the characters. The original situation, or the beginning, is not caused by any of these linked events, and, after the catastrophe, the series of events is terminated for the purposes of the poet, though the end or catastrophe may be the cause of a new series of events with which the spectators have nothing to do. Lear and his daughters are dead ; no more harm or blessing can come from them, and that Kent,<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> The word translated *imitation* seems to mean concrete, artistic embodiment, and is applied to painting, tragedy, and epic poetry. It evidently does not carry the idea of photographic realism.

<sup>2</sup> It is not certain that Kent can endure to survive his loved master.

Edgar, and Albany will restore the civil and moral order is no part of the tragedy of *Lear*. Every work of art must make a unified impression,—a powerful impression if the work be great art; and in a tragedy the character-group must be a unit and the myth or story a unit, for a play cannot be made up of alternate acts of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, to take an extreme example. Shakespeare always attains unity in the true sense, except perhaps in *Troilus and Cressida*, when the death of Hector is not dramatically connected with the perfidy of Cressida. This rule of unity of plot was taken to forbid the introduction of sub-plots or episodes, as in the *Merchant of Venice* and *Lear*. Aristotle says: ‘Of all plots and actions the episodes are the worst. I call a plot episodic, in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence.’ A plot in which the characters are divided into two groups, and there is a culmination of the action in each group, though the individuals of each group freely mix and influence the acts of the other, as Shylock binds the casket story to the story of the Merchant of Venice, would not be one in which ‘the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence.’ No play constructed with skillfully interwoven plots, in which the interest in the secondary story was carefully subordinated to the main story, existed in Greece. But the critics did not notice that much of what Aristotle said is applicable to Greek plays alone, though the rest is applicable to all dramatic art. In the twelfth section he enumerates the separate parts into which Tragedy is divided, namely: ‘Prologue, Episode, Exodus, Choric Song; this last being divided into Parodos and Stasimon. These are common to all plays, peculiar to some are the songs of the actors from the stage and the Commos.’

He says :—

The Prologue is that entire part of a tragedy which precedes the Parodos of the Chorus. The episode is that part of a tragedy which has no choric song after it. Of the Choric part, the Parodos is the first undivided utterance of the Chorus. The Stasimon is a choric ode without anapests or trochees ; the Commos is a joint lamentation of Chorus and actors.

The mention of the Chorus as on an equality with the actors might have warned the critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the Greek philosopher was commenting on a different art-form from the tragedies they were in the habit of witnessing. But few of them insisted on this. If he was talking about a different tragedy, that at least was the true and real tragedy, and, so far as men varied from the norm, so far they were wrong. There were so many maxims in his treatise of universal validity that all must be true. The Greek said also, ‘Whether Tragedy has as yet perfected its proper types or not, and whether it is to be judged in itself abstractly or in relation also to the audience,—this raises another question.’ This also they overlooked, for the idea that a professional playwright of their grandfather’s day had perfected another ‘proper type’ would have seemed as preposterous as the assurance that somebody had written a new Bible. They had not yet learned from Mr. Kipling that—

There are three and thirty ways  
Of constructing tribal lays,  
And-every-one-of-thein-is-right.

Shakespeare must have heard the rules discussed ; for he was a playwright in the active practice of his profession, and intimate with Ben Jonson and others of

the classical school who regarded Seneca as an authority on construction. A comedy can more easily be made to conform to the rules than a tragedy, for the action is largely determined by whim or chance, rather than by fate or passion. The writer can make things happen as rapidly as he likes, for they are arbitrary happenings not dependent on slow incubation in the human will. In a comedy men and women are willful, but they are puppets in the hands of their designer; in a tragedy they are motive-driven, and assume mastery over their creator. *Love's Labour's Lost* is a comedy, but it observes the unity of time and place well enough. The place is either a 'park with a palace in it,' or 'another part of the same,' with 'a Pavilion and tents at a distance.' The scenes succeed one another with no suggestion of an interval, and may readily be supposed to have occupied the hours of one long day. The pageant of the nine worthies is presented in the 'posterior of the day.' After it is over the young King of Navarre says to the Princess of France:—

Now at this latest minute of the hour,  
Grant us your loves.

To which she replies very properly:—

A time, methinks, too short  
To make a world-without-end bargain in.

This is a comedy. There is no reason to wait for the slow growth of a purpose in a weakened will or the gathering together of causes before they can effect the final catastrophe. The motive force is whim; the counterforce, the natural attraction between young people. The story has little to do with the ongoing of time. One of the last plays of Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, also observes the unity of time and place, but this is so distinctly a work of the imagination that it

is independent of time and place. A magician is managing the action, and if we admit that he can wreck a ship and save the passengers and put the crew to sleep and repair the vessel and hang music in the air in the course of a few hours, why not allow that a sincere love can bud and blossom in the hearts of Ferdinand and Miranda as rapidly as the other marvels? But in the *Winter's Tale*, written about the same time, Shakespeare disregards the unities entirely, closes the stage in Sicily at the end of the third act, and opens the fourth act, with 'Time' as Chorus, in Bohemia fourteen years later. This is a romance, for which hard-and-fast rules would be an unsupportable tyranny. But in Shakespeare's serious tragedies — his historical plays do not enter into the question — time plays an important part. After Hamlet receives the message from his father's spirit, he spends two months in inaction, brooding over his shame. After the banquet scene, Macduff journeys to London and back to Dunsinane. The time required for this and in consulting with Siward and Malcolm could not have been less than three months. In fact, whenever time is required for the maturing of a plan or the consolidating of motives into an act, time is taken without any regard to the artificial unities of time and place. But event follows event, and all move logically to a predetermined end. Unity of action in the true sense is always observed. Every scene has its place in the main development. But the disregard of time and place constitute one of the counts of the indictment of Shakespeare by critics of the classical school. It is difficult for us to understand how such trivial and formal objections could be made by intelligent persons.

The second objection urged against the plays by the critics of the same order was bringing comic scenes into tragedies. Aristotle carries the idea that a comedy

is a comedy, and a tragedy a tragedy, and that it is bad art to combine the kinds, though he nowhere directly says so. A playwright in his time was either a tragedian or a comedian — never both. The object of a tragedy, he says, is ‘to purify the mind of the onlooker by sympathy and alarmed excitement.’ It must not ‘present the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity,’ but that of a ‘man who is not eminently good and just yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty.’ The first would strike us as unjust, and would arouse anger rather than sympathy. There is no hint that the effect may or may not be heightened by the contrast of tragic scenes with comic scenes, but tragedy, he says, is ‘something serious and dignified,’ hence it was assumed by the eighteenth-century critics that to combine or contrast the two was bad art.

Again, the hero in the tragedy must not only be a good man, but he must be a man of social importance. Aristotle says, ‘Tragedies are founded on the story of a few houses — on the fortunes of Alcmaeon, Œdipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and those others who have done or suffered something terrible.’ ‘Tragedy is an imitation [artistic presentation] of persons who are above the common level.’ The bearing and language of these persons is always heroic and dignified. They are contending against fate ; in the back-ground looms the family curse. Shakespeare was greatly censured, even by those who could not deny the attraction of his plays, for making his kings sometimes act and talk like ordinary people. They thought that this was not only bad art, it was striking at the sacred foundation of society, — respect for rulers. To represent Claudius as indulging in a drunken revel, or Henry V as talking familiarly with his soldiers, even

when disguised, was held to be a shocking impropriety. Kings, our ancestors thought, were always on dress-parade; at least they should always be shown so on the stage, otherwise their awful majesty would be lessened. These three views were held quite generally in the eighteenth century, and the statement of them is necessary to explain the tone of Shakespearean criticism when it began to take definite form.

Much of this slavish respect for the rules and for dignity of character and treatment was due to the French, and Englishmen were always found to resent it. The French had developed their own tragedy largely on the pattern of Seneca, whose pompous and tiresome plays had the seal of classicism. The hero and heroine make long harangues called 'tirades.' They are usually characters from Grecian or Roman history. The dialogue is dignified and correct, and is in rhyme. Some of the French heroic tragedies are exceedingly beautiful, but not beautiful in a way we should call dramatic. They usually observe the unities carefully. We cannot well say that the *Cid* is more or less beautiful than *Hamlet*, they are so entirely different in art conception. One is Gothic, the other Latin. They are expressions of different races. But to a certain school of eighteenth-century critics the French tragedy was what a tragedy ought to be, and the English tragedy was 'irregular.' The perennial attraction of the Shakespearean plays was accounted for on the hypothesis that they contained some fine passages,—that the author was a crazy creature but inspired. There is an element of real beauty in the French neo-classic drama which appealed strongly to the eighteenth-century mind, even in England. There is dignity, formality, scholarship, and regularity. The general conception of life and of dramatic interest is different

from that held by the Elizabethans. The characters represent man as a member of a highly artificial society. Mr. Taine says:—

If Racine or Corneille had framed a psychology, they would have said with Descartes: ‘Man is an incorporeal soul, served by organs, endowed with reason and will, living in palaces or porticos, made for conversation and society, whose harmonious and ideal action is developed by discourses and replies, in a world constructed by logic beyond the realms of time and space.

If Shakespeare had framed a psychology, he would have said with Esquirol:<sup>1</sup> ‘Man is a nervous machine, governed by a mood, transported by unbridled passions, essentially unreasoning, a mixture of animal and poet, having no rapture but mind, no sensibility but virtue, imagination for prompter and guide, and led at random, by the most determinate and complex circumstances, to pain, crime, madness, and death.

While this is a very incomplete *aperçu* of the Shakespearean conception of life, it serves to emphasize the radical distinction between the French and the Elizabethan tragedy. To us it suggests that the French tragic hero, governed by ‘noblesse oblige’ and talking in the ‘high Roman fashion,’ is tiresome, while the emotional hero of Shakespeare appeals to human sympathy, and is, in consequence, interesting. But in England after the Restoration the French method came into favor with the educated class.<sup>2</sup> The new king, Charles II, was half French by blood and more than half French by education. His favorites were Frenchwomen and Frenchmen, and so the court gave its powerful sup-

<sup>1</sup> A celebrated French alienist.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless we who remember Rachel in *Phèdre* must believe that there is something great and elemental in Racine, not touching human sympathy like *Hamlet* and *Othello*, but alarming and frightful.

port to French fashions and French art. In 1660 the regular theatres were opened, and Elizabethan plays were at first acted because there were no others. Then Dryden wrote plays for which the French tragedy was a model. He and another playwright even rewrote some of Shakespeare's plays, for there was none of the reverence for the original form that controls us now. In about fifteen years a new school of playwrights came into existence: Congreve, Farquhar, Vanbrugh, Wycherley, introducing the society play of gallantry and wit. Shakespeare always held his own on the stage, partly owing to the presence of a very fine actor, Betterton, to whose enthusiasm we owe the preservation of most of the traditions and the meagre information concerning the poet's career that we possess. It was, however, not till 1709 that a definite edition of the plays (Rowe's) appeared. Till then men had to depend on the few folio volumes in existence, with here and there some quartos either single or bound in a volume of half a dozen plays, some of which might have been Shakespeare's and some the work of other Elizabethan playwrights. Then began the long fight over the text, which occupied the attention of Pope, Theobald, Steevens, Capell, Johnson, and Malone during the eighteenth century.

Dryden was too good a poet and too able a man and too skilled a craftsman not to appreciate Shakespeare. At the same time he was under the domination of the superstitions of the scholar. In his own plays, begun with the *Wild Gallant*, 1662, and running through twenty years with the production of some twenty-seven plays, he adhered to the heroic model of the French drama, as is shown by the titles *All for Love* (the Cleopatra story), *Conquest of Granada*, etc. For some time he carried out the idea that plays should be written

in the rhyming couplet, largely because such was the French practice. It is evident that this must result in a very different play from those of his great predecessor, who uses, first the familiar prose of everyday life, second, a lofty and measured prose, and third, blank verse, all of these being modified for the occasion and speaker, each adapted to higher and lower emotional expression, and the combination of the three giving an instrument of great scope and flexibility. But though Dryden's dramatic ideal was so different from that of the Elizabethans, and though there was among literary men and critics a general opinion that the French tragedies were 'right tragedies,' and a disposition to say of *Othello* and *Hamlet*, 'They are striking, but are they art?' Dryden left on record one of the finest appreciations of Shakespeare. Dryden's plays were published from time to time, and most of his criticism is contained in the prefaces. The *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* was published separately in 1668, and is based to a certain extent on the treatises of Corneille. It was the third in a series of documents written by Dryden and his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard, also a playwright. It is cast in the form of a dialogue in which Crites represents Howard; Neander, Dryden; Eugenius, Lord Buckhurst, who maintains that the French tragedies are more regular and therefore of a higher type than the English, and Lisideius, Sir Charles Sedley. It is a discussion in the form of a dialogue, and Mr. Lowell calls it 'by far<sup>1</sup> the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English.' We are at least in the company of four of the most cultured men of the time. Dryden's other deliverances on the subject of dramatic criticism are the *Defense of an Essay of*

<sup>1</sup> Is 'by far' quite fair to Landor, to say nothing of Macaulay's *Cowley and Milton*?

*Dramatic Poesy*, *Heroic Plays*, *An Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic License*, the *Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, and the short ‘Epistle dedicatory’ to the *Rival Ladies*. It is in the *Essay* and the *Defense* that Dryden shows himself a great critic, and his language about Shakespeare is that of one who feels and comprehends the poet’s supremacy, though hampered in his judgment by the conventional regard for the ‘ancients.’ He reminds us of a judge of strong English common sense and regard for equity, forced to decide one of those cases where the old law manifestly works absurd injustice, and allowing his sense of right to rule him though he cannot quite discard his reverence for precedent. Thus Dryden says :—

To begin with Shakespeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, *had the largest and most comprehensive soul*. All the images of nature were still present to him and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily : when he describes anything you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation : he was naturally learned ; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature ; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike ; were he so I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid ; his comic wit degenerating into clenches,<sup>1</sup> his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him ; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets.

But he had written just before : ‘It will be first necessary to speak somewhat of Shakespeare and Fletcher

<sup>1</sup> ‘Clenches’ are quibbles or cheap puns. But where does Mr. Dryden find ‘bombast’ except in the mouth of bombastic characters and properly placed ?

his [Ben Jonson's] rivals in poesy, and one of them, in my opinion, at least his equal, perhaps his superior.'

One would imagine that if Shakespeare had the 'largest and most comprehensive soul of all modern poets,' which greatness of soul was evidenced by his writings alone, it would be contradictory to speak of him as Jonson's, equal 'perhaps his superior.' But the appreciation is a fine one, and the only evidence of Dryden's belief in the heresy of the day is, 'he drew them,'— his representations of nature,— 'not laboriously but *luckily*,' as if here were an exceptional person taught to write above a mental pitch by some 'affable, familiar ghost that mighty gulls him with intelligence'— the old and long-to-survive notion of the 'inspired savage,' a phrase sometimes applicable to mathematicians, but never to dramatists, who of all others must learn by labor and never 'forget the adjoining world.' Dryden elsewhere calls the Elizabethans 'the great race before the flood,' and says of Shakespeare, 'In his magic circle none dared tread but he,' the last an admirable phrase, but still implying something more than mortal power. It took another century to discover that Shakespeare's preëminence depended on the possession of the literary artistic power in a very high degree, the exercise of it in a language not yet hampered, except among the scholars, by conventional phrases, the possession of a very wide, unconscious human sympathy, and the necessity of writing for the general public and not for the literary coterie. The effect of this last condition might be questioned, for his sonnets show him as much of a poet as do his tragedies, but at all events it gave us Falstaff and Silence.

Dryden, it will be observed, was a little in advance of his time. He refuses to yield to the French regard for the unities, and stands up manfully for his own

country. He speaks in the person of 'Neander,' — new man, — and gives the rôle of the conservatives to Crites, Sir Robert Howard, his brother-in-law, and Lisideius, Sir Charles Sedley. The position that English plays are a serious and worthy form of art is admitted, and that in itself argues a great advance in criticism ; for the interlocutors are representative scholars of the class who sixty years earlier would have scouted the idea that the moderns were equal to the ancients. Eugenius says, 'There is no man more ready to adore those great Greeks and Romans than I am, but on the other side I cannot think so contemptibly of the age in which I live, or so dishonorably of my own country as not to judge we equal the ancients in most kinds of poesy and in some surpass them.'

Lisideius says that 'he conceived a play ought to be a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humors and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind,' a definition with which no one can find fault, and free from the absurd requirement that a play written in the year 1700 should conform in certain details of construction to those written two thousand years earlier. The phrase 'a just and lively image of human nature' would preclude all artificial requirements, but is itself the basis of the rule 'follow nature,' of which we hear so much during the next century. In fact, to decide what is an 'image' is the prime question of æsthetics, and to decide what is 'human nature' is the prime question of philosophy. Dryden's definition, like all definitions, opens the field for more discussion. But the principle is far nearer right than if he had added that a play was to be a just and lively image of human nature drawn in the manner supposed to be that of Grecian dramatists.

Common sense and a vigorous understanding can never rise quite superior to the conventions of the age, but Dryden comes as near doing so as any literary man of any time. Of the French playwrights, Neander says : —

By their servile observations of the unities of time and place, and the integrity of scenes, they have brought on themselves that dearth of plot and narrowness of imagination, which may be observed in all their plays. How many beautiful accidents might happen in two or three days which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of twenty-four hours ? There is time to be allowed also for maturity of design, which amongst great and prudent persons, such as are often represented in tragedy, cannot with any likelihood of truth be brought to pass at so short a warning. Farther by tying themselves strictly to the unity of place, and unbroken scenes, they are forced many times to omit some beauties which cannot be shown where the act began, but might if the scene were interrupted and the stage cleared for the persons to enter in another place.

On the fly-leaf of a copy of Rymer's *The Tragedies of the Last Age*, Dryden wrote : ‘It is not enough that Aristotle said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides, and if he had seen ours might have changed his mind.’

Shakespearean criticism is closely bound up with this question of the absolute authority of the ‘ancients’ for the next hundred years, and it is difficult for us to understand how much independence of judgment and sturdy good sense is implied in an expression like the above, which appears to us a mere truism.

In *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, Dryden lays down excellent rules for the conduct of a play, though not without reference to the artificial standard of the times. He says, ‘ Pointed wit and sentences

affected out of season ; these are nothing of kin to the violence of passion. No man is at leisure to make sentences and similes when his soul is in agony.'

He refers evidently to such expressions as Othello's

Like to the Pontic Sea,  
Whose icy current and compulsive course  
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on —

or to Macbeth's

Life . . . is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

It is true that when a 'soul is in agony' it does not 'make sentences and similes,' neither does it speak in blank verse, still less in rhyme. The sentences and similes come to it. The stress and excitement of emotion in the natural man force language to take a highly poetic color. The classic hero is dignified and restrained in all circumstances, and our perception of this gives his words power ; but a poetic nature — and a Teutonic hero must be a man of imaginative excitability — rises naturally to figurative heights of expression when 'his soul is in agony.' Indeed, in such stress uneducated persons sometimes express themselves in language of wonderful reach and poignancy. Even the wildest extravagances of Shakespeare's heroes are not out of place. Lear and Othello can disclose themselves in no other way.

Dryden goes on to say : 'If Shakespeare be allowed, as I think he must, to have made his characters distinct, it will easily be inferred that he understood the nature of the passions, because it has already been proved that confused passions make indistinguishable characters.' In this he falls into two of the errors of early criticism, first, that a man must 'understand the nature of the

passions' in order to create characters, as if the artist were a workman handling material the nature of which he understood as a smith does his iron. He takes it for granted that the 'passions' are distinct parts of the character, which may represent avarice or revenge or some 'ruling passion'; and second, that 'confused passions make indistinguishable characters.' 'Confused passions,' or readiness to respond to different emotions, indicate complex characters in which contradictory impulses, love, ambition, mercy, and revenge, struggle for mastery in a strongly marked individual. The better human nature is understood, the more evident it becomes that Shakespeare's conception of character was true, not because he 'understood the nature of the passions,' but because he divined the complexity of man. In the same paper, however, Dryden writes that 'Shakespeare had a universal mind, which comprehended all characters and all passions,' a saying almost as adequate as the great one: 'of all men, ancient and modern, he had the most comprehensive soul.' Dryden is rightly given a very high rank among the critics of Shakespeare. He wrote before there was any body of criticism to guide and inspire him, and when the plays were still buried in the old folios.

Thomas Rymer (1641–1713) is highly esteemed by historians for his *Federa*, a collection of the original documents of the alliances and treaties between England and other countries from 1101 to his own time, an undertaking which as 'historiographer royal' he prosecuted with great industry from 1672 to his death. He wrote a tragedy in 1667, entitled *Edgar, or the English Monarch*, which was not successful, and in 1678 a pamphlet, *The Tragedies of the Last Age considered*. In 1693 appeared his little book, *A Short View of Tragedy*. As a critic he is a very preposterous person,

that is, he was deficient in the first requisite, a capacity for sympathetically appreciating a work of literary art, and was entirely unaware of his deficiency. He is mentioned here because the utterances of the preposterous person have a certain significance in disclosing the limits of the opinion of the age. Such a person, writing at the present time, bows to public opinion in assuming that the plays are great literature, but tries to prove that they were written by Lord Bacon on the ground that a man lacking the advantages of 'classical education' cannot possibly be a great poet. That a scholar and literary man like Rymer could write a book assuming that Shakespeare's plays were nonsense shows that a century after the appearance of the great plays their true value was not generally understood, notwithstanding the appreciation of Dryden and of many others of literary insight. So general became the opinion that Shakespeare was a great poet as well as a great dramatist in the next century, that to criticise him adversely was to write one's self down an ass,—

Deaf to the melody of sound,  
To every form of beauty blind,

which the most obtuse person hesitates to do. Even George III, when confessing to Miss Burney that Shakespeare's plays were 'sad stuff,' adds, 'But one must not say so, you know.'

Rymer's style is detestable, and goes to prove how much English prose owes to John Dryden for consecutiveness and intelligibility. In his second book he quotes quite freely from *Othello*, and the effect of finding the address to the senate,—'most potent grave and reverend Signiors,'—and Othello's farewell to war on his pages is very odd, something as if a man should discern a heap of jewels amid the ordure of a stable floor.

The first he calls a ‘tedious and heavy form of pleading,’ and the second ‘has nothing poetical in it besides the sound that pleases.’ One cannot tell whether it was perversity or dullness of ear that made him deaf to the dignified melody of the orations in *Julius Cæsar*. That he should entirely overlook the feminine charm of Desdemona and the heart-rending pathos of the situation and the matronly dignity of Portia—dear to Brutus as the ‘ruddy drops that visit’ his ‘sad heart’—is not so much to be wondered at, for no one seems to have noticed the delicacy and beauty of Shakespeare’s heroines till the end of the eighteenth century: this is one of the strangest facts in the history of Shakespearean criticism; but that Rymer should not have noticed the eloquent beat of poetry that from its first delivery stirred the hearts of all Englishmen seems incomprehensible. What was the mental condition of a man who wrote—

This may show with what indignity our Poet treats the noblest Romans. But there is no other cloth in his wardrobe. Every one must be contented to wear a fool’s coat who comes to be dressed by him.

Nor is he more civil to the ladies.

Portia in good manners might have challenged more respect, she that shines, a glory of the first magnitude in the Galaxy of Heroic Dames is with our poet scarce one remove from a natural. She is the own cousin German, of one piece, the very same impertinent, silly flesh and blood with Desdemona. Shakespeare’s genius lay for Comedy and Humour. *In tragedy he appears quite out of his element*, he raves and rambles without any coherence, any spark of reason, or any rule to control him or set bounds to his frenzy.

Rymer had no doubt heard the great actor, Betterton, deliver the tragic music of *Othello*, and it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the failure of his

tragedy *Edgar*, and the success of *Othello* and *Julius Cæsar* in winning the plaudits of the audience, had aroused in him a feeling of personal animosity against the great dramatist. Preposterous as it seems, a similar sentiment probably actuated Voltaire half a century later.

Rymer bears testimony to the fact that the scene between Othello and Iago, III, iii, is the 'top scene that raises *Othello* above all other tragedies on our theatre.' This is interesting, though he attributes the success to the actors. We also find him under the influence of an error that has done a great deal to vitiate dramatic criticism in men infinitely his superiors: that is, that the characters of a drama must conform to certain traditions,—the kings move in a world of unreal and unbending dignity, the soldier be a stage soldier, and the villain a stage villain. Rymer complains of Iago, that Shakespeare, to 'entertain the audience with something new and surprising against common sense, would pass upon us a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal instead of an open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing soldier, a character constantly worn by them for some thousands of years in the world' (the Duke of Alva, for instance, or General Monk). Shakespeare does, in his minor characters, use the traditional stage figures,—the 'miles gloriosus' in *Parolles* or the Bobadil in *Pistol*, but his *dramatis personæ* are persons, each 'himself alone.' Even his clowns have each an individual flavor, and the jesting of Touchstone is on a different key from that of Feste in *Twelfth Night*. All this, however, was not to be discovered till the nineteenth century, and is of course far beyond the ken of Rymer.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The modern preposterous person,—the race is immortal,—if he ventures on Shakespearian criticism, takes up the thesis that

Rymer is evidently entirely negligible as far as appreciation or intelligent criticism of the drama is concerned.<sup>1</sup> He is mentioned to show that at the end of the seventeenth century, in spite of the generous praise of Dryden, the reputation of Shakespeare was not so firmly established as to render it impossible for senseless abuse of the plays to be published by a member of the learned and scholarly world. He was rebuked by Dennis and Gildon, literary critics of the period, in short critical

Francis Bacon was the writer of the plays, and in an extreme instance, like Mr. Ignatius Donnelly, finds a cryptogram imbedded in the text. The motive of money-getting raises him above the spiteful ineptitude of Rymer. Another favorite pursuit of the preposterous person is hunting for mare's nests and exploiting the plays as mines of mystical meanings, a pursuit inaugurated by the German Romanticists. In an edition of the Sonnets the editor thus interprets the play of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in *Midsummer Night's Dream* : —

'The student will see the signification of the wall, "the vile wall which did these lovers sunder." Through this wall (the dull substance of the flesh) the lovers may indeed communicate but only by a "whisper, very secretly," because the intercourse of spirit with spirit is a secret act of the soul in a sense of its unity with the spirit. The student will readily catch the meaning of the "moonshine" or nature light, the moon being always taken as nature in all mystic writings. He will see the symbolism of the "dog"—the watch-dog of course—representing the moral guard in a nature-life ; as also the bush of thorns ever ready to illustrate the doctrine that the way of the transgressor is hard. The student will notice the hint that the lovers meet by moonlight and at a tomb, and he will understand the office of the lion which tears not Thisbe herself, but only her mantle, or what the poet calls the extenu of life ; and finally will observe that the two principles disappear, for the unity cannot become mystically visible until the two principles are mystically lost sight of.'

This is a touch beyond Mr. Thomas Rymer. Changing Ben Jonson's lines a little, we can say, —

Triumph, my country, thou hast two to show  
To whom all fools of Europe homage owe.

<sup>1</sup> Rymer seems to have used the quarto of *Othello* in his extracts.

publications, but not with the scorn his sentiments merited. There was evidently in the literary world a feeling that playwrights ought to observe the unities. Even Dryden did so at first, though later he said that he preferred to 'sin with honest Shakespeare.' In the next generation Addison in his 'Cato' followed the rules very closely and produced a very uninteresting play. Numerous writers of less note followed the same standard, regardless of the fact that their plays were rarely successful and that Shakespeare continued to delight large audiences, a sure proof that he was right in his practice. In 1709 Rowe's edition was brought out, and the long struggle on the proper readings was inaugurated to continue through the eighteenth century, in the editions of Pope, Theobald, Johnson, Steevens, and Malone. This involved a consideration of his merits as a dramatist, for each edition was prefaced with an introduction containing more or less literary criticism. As soon as the plays were published in a form accessible to the public the conviction that the author was a great dramatist was certain to spread till it became a matter of national faith, strongest among those least capable of justifying it. The rational grounds for such a feeling were not investigated till the nineteenth century.

#### JOHN DENNIS (1657-1734)

Dennis was a literary man of the period and, like most of his colleagues, a playwright whose dramas could not hold the stage.<sup>1</sup> He was a vain and irascible per-

<sup>1</sup> Dennis invented a method of producing stage-thunder, and being present at a presentation of *Macbeth* where his invention was used, he rose and said, 'The rascals have refused my play, but they have stolen my thunder.' A man who adds to the language a phrase so frequently useful is entitled to the gratitude of posterity.

son, and disappointment and poverty made him envious and unreasonable in his later days. He criticised Pope's Homer and Pope's pastoral poetry with great vigor, and incurred the enmity of the poet, who gave him a conspicuous place in the *Dunciad*. His criticism of Pope's writings was mixed with personalities, and it is greatly to the credit of the poet whose art, religion, and person were subjected to vulgar abuse, that when Dennis was old, poor, and neglected he joined in a subscription for his relief. Dennis was a learned man, and in some regards a good critic,—he was very appreciative of the great qualities of Milton,—but he was possessed with the notion of the authority of the ancients and of the binding character of 'the rules.' Unlike the ridiculous Rymer, he recognizes that 'Shakespeare was one of the greatest geniuses that the world e'er saw for the tragic stage.' He says that—

His imaginations were often as just as they were bold and strong. He had a natural discretion which never could have been taught him, and his judgment was strong and penetrating. He seems to have wanted nothing but time and leisure for thought to have found out those rules of which he appears so ignorant. . . . His expression is in many places good and pure after a hundred years; simple tho' elevated, graceful tho' bold, and easy tho' strong. He *seems to have been the original of our English Tragical harmony.*

He then finds fault with Shakespeare for making so many of his aristocratic personages talk and act like ordinary mortals, 'against the dignity of noble poetry,' and for paying no attention to 'poetic justice.' He says, 'The good and the bad then, perishing promiscuously in the best of Shakespeare's Tragedies, there can be either none or only weak instruction in them; for such promiscuous events call the government of Providence

into question and by sceptics and libertines are resorbed into chance.' It does not seem to occur to him that 'sceptics and libertines' are usually acute enough to draw from the 'promiscuous events' of life the conclusion that the good and the bad 'perish promiscuously' when the laws of life are violated by either.

He develops with considerable force the thesis that Shakespeare was not conversant with ancient history and says that 'his friends were not qualified to advise him,' for even 'Ben Jonson had no right notion of Tragedy.' 'Jonson erred grossly in Tragedy, of which there were not only stated rules but rules which he had often read and had even translated.' If Shakespeare had only had Mr. Dennis at his elbow, he might have written some tragedies not only fine but regular. As that could not be, Dennis 'employed some time and pains, and that little judgment which I have acquired in these matters by a long and faithful reading both of ancients and moderns, in adding, retrenching, and altering several things in the *Coriolanus* of Shakespeare.' It was put on the stage, and failed in spite of the 'improvements.' The idea that there were 'monstrous fine things' and grave structural faults in Shakespeare's plays, and that the fine things could be cut out and reset in a regular frame, was very prevalent among literary men in the seventeenth century. It was the cause of the adaptations and amended versions, some twenty-five of which were put on the stage between 1670 and 1703. The first and most sacrilegious was Dryden and Davenant's desecration of *The Tempest*; the most excusable was Colley Cibber's version of *Richard III*. For the modern stage, of course, acting versions have to be prepared, because Shakespeare, whose scenes were imaginary, changes the place so frequently — in one act of *Antony and Cleopatra* eighteen times — that

the modern manager cannot afford to present his plays as they were written. Another reason is that the plays are too long for modern representation, when a change of scene means a change of scenery. This adaptation to the modern stage is, of course, quite a different thing from rewriting the play, bringing in new matter and new characters, as was done with such disastrous results in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup>

**CHARLES GILDON (1665-1724)**

Gildon belongs to the same class as Dennis,—hack-writer, playwright, scholar, and critic,—but was a person of a much more amiable and manageable disposition. He, too, changed one of Shakespeare's plays, *Measure for Measure*, into something poor and strange, but he condemned Dryden and Davenant's version of *The Tempest*, and, like Dennis, he became a mark for the satire of Pope. In 1710 he contributed two essays to an additional volume for Rowe's edition of the plays: one entitled 'An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage,' and the other 'Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare.' His general position does not differ greatly from that of Dennis, though he insists more on the poet's disregard of the unities and less on his violation of poetic justice. 'Nature,' he says (enabled Shakespeare to succeed in Manners<sup>2</sup> and Diction often to perfection, but he could never by his force of genius or nature vanquish the barbarous mode of the times and come to any excellence in the Fable except in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Tempest*). In his second essay Gildon gives the epitomes of the plots of

<sup>1</sup> This subject is fully treated in Professor Lounsbury's excellent volume, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*.

<sup>2</sup> By the term 'Manners' Gildon apparently means character-drawing.

the successive plays, and generally some reference to the sources of the story and copious quotations of passages that seem admirable to him. This is, then, the first commentary, the germ of Gervinus and Brandeis. Of Lear he says that ‘the King and Cordelia ought by no means to have died, and therefore Mr. Tate has very justly altered that particular which must disgust the audience and reader to have so much virtue and piety meet so unjust a reward.’

He approves of *Much Ado about Nothing*: ‘To quote all the comick excellences of this play would be to transcribe three parts of it. For all that passes between Benedict and Beatrice is admirable. . . . For while Shakespeare is out in the Dramatic Imitation of the Fable he always draws men and women so perfectly that when we read, we can scarce persuade ourselves but that the discourse is real and no fiction.’

People of rank must not express themselves naturally. ‘The scolding between Elinor and Constance [*King John*] is quite out of character; and indeed it is a difficult matter to represent a quarrel betwixt two women without falling into something indecent for their degree to speak, as most of what is said in this scene is. For whatever the Ladies of the stocks-market might do, Queens and Princesses can never be supposed to talk to one another at that rate.’

The disregard of the unity of time and place in the historical plays is shocking, for of *Henry VIII* he says:—

This concludes the English Historical Plays; tho the rest are indeed little better, yet they generally are within a narrower compass of time and take in fewer actions. Tho when they exceed the unities, I see no reason why they may not as well and with good reason stretch the time to five thousand years and the actions to all the nations and people of the uni-

verse, and as there has been a puppet-show of the Creation of the World so there may be a Play called the History of the World.

Gildon sternly condemns the ‘wholly monstrous, unnatural mixture of tragedy and comedy’ in the same play, on the authority of the ancients, one of whom had said ‘Wit and Railery belong not properly to a tragedy, to which laughter is an enemy.’ Dryden had said :—

Why should he [the classic critic] imagine the soul of man more heavy than his senses? Does not the eye pass from an unpleasant object to a pleasant one in much shorter time than is required for this? and does not the unpleasantness of the first commend the beauty of the second?

Mr. Gildon argues that—

The soul can no more pass in a moment from the tumult of a strong passion in which it is thoroughly engaged than the sea can pass from the most turbulent and furious storm into a perfect calm in a moment. There must be time for the terrible emotion to subside by degrees into a calm, and there must be a gradual passage from the extremity of grief, pity, or the like to its opposite, mirth, humor, or laughter.

Mr. Gildon seems to think that the grief we feel at the death of Hamlet is precisely the same as the emotion that would possess us at the lamentable end of a dear brother. If that were so, no one but ghouls could be dragged to see the play. He might as well argue that a picture of a battle was dangerous on the walls of a room. Art is the representation of life without its frightful responsibilities. The grief we feel at witnessing a tragic action on the stage is an artificial, a stimulated emotion, but the amusement with which we witness a comedy is genuine. This is a profound difference between comedy and tragedy, but no reason why they should not be combined. A year or two later

Theobald tells us, 'For these thirty years last past, I believe, not a season has elapsed in which it [*Hamlet*] has not been performed on the stage more than once.' The audiences insisted on the gravediggers' scene, and rebelled when it was cut out. This might well have given the critics pause. For when an art representation is delightful to several generations, there must be some philosophical explanation of the fact. The audiences of a season may be wrong, but there is no appeal from the verdict of the audiences of a century. It does not follow that the play which lasts is perfect, but it does follow that its great qualities are far more important than its defects, and are the qualities for which the critic should search and which he should try to bring to the light. It also follows that the defects are not detachable.

These two Shakespearean commentators are by no means of prime importance, but their writings show that the cultivated and scholarly world believed in the early eighteenth century that there were in Shakespeare's plays admirable passages due to an untutored poetical genius, and grave faults due to the fact that he had never learned the rules for a correct drama, and further that his plays might be rewritten so as to retain the beauties and eliminate the errors. When they tried to do this, the result, to their great surprise, was a play which would not hold an audience. Tate's *Lear* and Cibber's *Richard III*, it is true, were fairly well received, but the pit demanded the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet*, though 'the judicious' could easily prove that it was a dramatic blemish. To the audience it was not merely amusing, but a powerful and truthful presentation of one of the great contrasts of life. To the learned it was always a puzzle why Shakespeare's plays, written in defiance of the rules, were so attractive on the stage in their original

condition, and received with such indifference when the blemishes were removed. That the blemishes were really beauties could not be admitted for an instant, for Aristotle had not said so. The French dramatists were authorities in questions of good taste, and their tragedies were written in accordance with the rules. It took a long time to change this frame of the critical mind, and to this idea that the plays were full of barbarous errors is partly due the craze for amending the text by improvements, which possessed some of the eighteenth-century editors. When dogmas are once firmly established on authority, years must elapse before experience can prove that they are unsound. It is difficult to codify common sense in art so as to make it acceptable to professionals. It is perhaps more difficult to do so in government or religion. We need not wonder that it was a long time before the learned world gave up the idea that Shakespeare's faults were entirely technical and could be cured by applying a just method based on the practice of the writers of a foreign country two thousand years ago, or, rather, on the notions of learned men as to what that method was. The grasp of a dead hand is not readily relaxed.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EDITORS

#### NICHOLAS ROWE (1674-1718)

ROWE was the first of the multitude of Shakespearean editors. He was a successful playwright and literary man of the early eighteenth century, and attained the dignity of poet-laureate under Queen Anne. He brought out his edition of Shakespeare in seven octavo volumes in 1709. He used as his original a copy of the Fourth Folio, and thereby subjected himself to the burden of all the errors that the later folios superinduced on the first, so that many of the emendations he made are merely corrections of misprints he might have avoided by going back to the original. He had no idea of the value of the old quarto<sup>1</sup> texts, and little of the necessity of reading all available books of the Shakespearean period so as to familiarize himself with usages and expressions already becoming obsolete. In fact, neither he nor his successor, Pope, was a Shakespearean scholar in the modern sense. They could not well be so, since the duty of careful collation and investigation of sources was not then understood.

Nevertheless, Rowe did a good work. He put it in the power of everybody to procure in a convenient form and at a moderate cost all the plays. Men were no longer forced to buy a rare, cumbrous, and expensive folio or else content themselves with such pamphlets of

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Rowe inserted from the 1504 quarto *Hamlet*, or from some quarto now lost, the lines from 17 to 38, I, iv; and also fifty lines, IV, iv, including the great soliloquy, ‘How all occasions do inform against me.’

separate plays as they could find. Rowe brought the spelling up to date and corrected the irregular punctuation of the folios. He prefixed lists of the *dramatis personæ*, so useful in introducing the reader to the company whose intimate acquaintance he is about to make. Some of the plays in the folios are divided into acts and scenes, some into acts only, and some printed solid. Rowe divided all into acts and scenes, and his experience as a practical playwright enabled him to do this in the main properly, so that most of his divisions are accepted at present. The scenes in Shakespeare's plays, when marked in the folios, are distinguished by change of place, all the actors leaving the stage at the end of the scene, and not, as in the French stage, by a change of group so that a scene terminates when one actor departs or another enters. As change of local scene was left largely to the imagination in the Elizabethan period and was not marked by change of 'scenery,' the scenes in Shakespeare's plays are sometimes very numerous, and this feature presents great difficulty to modern representation, when every place is indicated by a change of 'set.' Rowe's task in dividing the plays into scenes was therefore one of little difficulty. Acts, on the contrary, should indicate the completion of a certain part of the action. Each act should be a chapter in the story, and the divisions plainly marked as steps in the unfolding of the plot and separated by a short interval. In setting these larger divisions, Rowe, thanks to his practical experience, shows in the main great good sense and conception of the artistic and logical effect of the dramatic chapter or act. In the scene divisions he followed, as said before, the method of the plays already divided, and regarded a scene as a locality. The divisions in any example of literary art — the paragraphs, the chapters, the cantos,

the scenes, and the acts — are of great importance in making an impression on the reader's eye and mind. If we regard the play primarily as a spectacle, the scenes should be short, for whenever a new person comes on the stage a new tableau is formed. The scenes thus become like a succession of pictures thrown on an illuminated screen ; they succeed one another rapidly and form a unified impression if they are artistically combined and contrasted. But if our fundamental conception of the play is action rather than spectacle, the scene or minor division may be longer and contain a definite part of the action or development of the story. A long scene of this kind is sometimes a little drama of itself. Thus in *Hamlet*, III, i, 'A room in the Castle,' the entire anti-Hamlet party enter and discuss the question of Hamlet's lunacy, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern retire, the King explains the test of Hamlet's sanity suggested by Polonius (II, ii) ; the Queen retires ; the two, Polonius and the King, instruct Ophelia and hide. Hamlet enters and delivers 'To be or not to be.' He notices Ophelia, and addresses her with bitter irony. He retires ; Ophelia's beautiful soliloquy, 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown,' follows ; the King and Polonius re-enter, and after a few words all depart.

Locally and dramatically this is one scene, and is so marked in the folio. One motif runs through it. From the pictorial point of view it is at least three, if not four. Pope, the next editor, made three without any warrant. He should have followed the folio, and should have noticed that though a drama is a compound of tableaux and actions, in Shakespeare's conception the action, the thing done, is the vital matter ; though the action may not be a concrete deed, it may be the 'struggle of a limed soul.' And in Shakespeare's plays, when

the stage is 'voided,' an entirely new subdivision of the action is presented. At the same time it must be admitted that the Shakespearean scene sometimes covers different dramatic elements. In *Hamlet*, III, iii, the King gives the courtiers his directions for the voyage to England. Polonius tells the King that he intends to overhear Hamlet's words to his mother; the King is left alone, and his ineffective attempt to pray follows; then Hamlet enters and watches him, and resolves not to kill him. The latter part of this marvelous scene has little to do with the beginning, either as a spectacle or as action. But the first part is subtly linked to the last by the fact that the King, after arranging for Hamlet's murder, prays to be forgiven for the murder of Hamlet's father. It is a marvelous disclosure of character when Claudius says, 'Then I'll look up; *my fault is past*,' and forgets that he has just arranged a new and equally heinous murder. It is never entirely safe to assume that Shakespeare committed a fault of construction. Rowe, then, was right in following the arrangement of scenes in the folio as far as possible.

Rowe's knowledge of the stage enabled him to correct the marking of exits and entrances, which were sometimes omitted and sometimes displaced in the original. He did something, too, towards distinguishing 'asides,' but very little towards emending difficult passages, except when the error is manifestly typographical. His edition, being from the Fourth Folio, includes, of course, *Pericles*, and the doubtful plays. A second edition was published in 1714.

Rowe perceives the power and beauty of the plays. There is none of the insufferable conceit of Rymer in his introductory essay. He holds, however, the eighteenth-century idea of the antithesis between 'nature'

and ‘art,’ and says of his author : ‘ Art had so little and nature so large a share in what he did, that for aught I know the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous and had the most fire and strength of imagination in them, were the best.’ This taking it for granted that the mysterious thing, genius, can be a master before it is an apprentice, comes very likely from the notion of the ‘divine afflatus’ as an extra-human energy entering into its chosen subjects, like ‘the power’ in a negro revival, and is an error running through much of early criticism. In fact, it is not entirely eradicated yet.

Again, Rowe says : ‘ Shakespeare lived under a kind of mere light of nature and had never been made acquainted with those written precepts’ (the rules), ‘so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of.’ Why not? *‘Ignorantia legis neminem excusat.’* But the true defense is, that the Greek rules are not binding on an English playwright except so far as they conform to the eternal laws governing the nature of a beautiful thing. Most of the eighteenth-century critics seem to think that the rules of Aristotle are like the Ten Commandments, based on the nature of right and wrong. Again, it is not the author, but the work, that is to be judged, and for the plays Rowe had a feeling of generous admiration.

If his service to his generation lay in making the plays more easily accessible, his service to posterity consists in putting in print all the information about the man Shakespeare he could procure. In the latter part of the seventeenth century the actor, Betterton, whose admirable interpretations of Othello, Hamlet, and the rest, contributed not a little to the reputation of the poet, went to Stratford and collected all the local tradition about William Shakespeare that had survived. Rowe, in

his sketch, acknowledged his obligation to Betterton. As a playwright, Rowe knew the friends of Sir William Davenant (1606–68), himself playwright and dramatist, who in his younger days must have known the actors and playwrights who were young men when Shakespeare died. Rowe was therefore in a better position than any writer of Shakespeare's life has ever been to find out and record the facts bearing on the personal history and character of the great dramatist. That he found out so little is remarkable, but he found out about all that we know. We have nothing in the handwriting of Shakespeare, and no record of a word he uttered. From his works we can form an idea of his character as an artist; the man himself remains in the background. Rowe's memoir testifies in general terms to his agreeableness as a companion, circumstances testify to his success as a man of business, and his book testifies to his greatness as a poet and thinker, and there is a hazy lot of evidence tending to establish his personal worth and human aberrations. But all this is very far from biographical matter; so that Mr. Sidney Lee, who knows everything that has been collected, is forced to begin many sentences with 'perhaps' or 'probably,' and, to make a book, must fill out his pages with literary biography. What was Shakespeare's attitude towards religion or towards the great religious bodies? We can answer only: 'Probably' he conformed to the Established Church, since he was married by its rite, his children were baptized into its communion, and he was buried in the parish church. So it is in regard to every question that would disclose Shakespeare's personality. In some regards he 'probably' was a very reticent person, though 'perhaps' superficially companionable. It is sometimes said that we know as much about Shakespeare as we do about any writer of his period. This is

an error. To be sure, biographical memoirs were not written when he died. But we can construct a fairly full biography of Ben Jonson, John Donne, Herrick, Daniel, and others of his period. The fact that the man Shakespeare is far back in the obscurity and the artist Shakespeare the centre of a brilliant light is one of the mysteries. ‘Perhaps’ all papers, letters, and the like were destroyed in the great fire of London. But why did not his daughter, Mrs. Susanna Hall, preserve a bundle at Stratford and transmit them to her daughter? ‘Perhaps’ they were ashamed of his calling as an actor. It is all conjectural, though biographers usually go so far as to say ‘no doubt, he attended the grammar school in Stratford like any other town boy.’

We are, therefore, much obliged to Nicholas Rowe for gathering what tradition he could and refraining from inventing rumors or expanding doubtful hints.

Rowe’s emendations, as said above, are confined to apparent typographical errors. For example, in *The Tempest*, I, ii, Prospero says to Miranda :—

[They] bore us some leagues to sea, where they prepared  
A rotten carkasse of a *butt*, not rigg’d,  
Nor tackle, sayle, nor mast, the very rats  
Instinctively have quit it —

Rowe naturally changed ‘butt’ to ‘boat,’ as the word ‘butt’ never meant boat, but only large barrel, or else object aimed at (archery butts), or (derivative) end of journey : ‘here is my butt and very sea-mark of my utmost sail’ (*Othello*). Respect for the folio and the conviction that Shakespeare would use a specific word instead of a general one leads modern commentators to retain ‘butt’ and to invent the explanation that a ‘butt’ was a kind of boat. It seems more likely that it was a misspelled boat than that it was an obsolete one. But no one can mistake the meaning.

In his literary criticism Rowe shows love and appreciation, though naturally falling in with many of the errors of the day. He says:—

The plays are properly to be distinguished only into comedies and tragedies. Those which are called histories and even some of his comedies are really tragedies with a run or mixture of comedy through them. That way of tragi-comedy was the common mistake of the age, and is indeed become so agreeable to the English taste, that though the severer critics among us cannot bear it, yet the generality of our audiences seem to be better pleased with it than with an exact tragedy.

In calling the historic plays tragedies, he certainly forgets for the moment that grand pageant, *Henry V*. The idea that a tragedy must be ‘pure,’ *i. e.*, free from anything that could rouse a smile as well as from any representation of life on the ordinary plane, and from all unheroic language, was one of the canons of criticism at the period.

Among the characters he seems to have been the most impressed with Falstaff and Shylock, as was perhaps natural, for both are striking in different ways; and the greater figures — Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and Macbeth — have a profundity in their relation to human nature not so easily sounded. Shakespeare’s supernatural characters appeal to him, and he says, ‘Certainly the greatness of this author’s genius does nowhere so much appear as where he gives his imagination an entire loose rein and raises his fancy above mankind and the limits of the visible world.’ He considers that Shakespeare is not strong in construction, and explains the fact by saying that ‘his tales were seldom invented, but taken from true history or novels or romances,’ and that he ‘commonly followed the authors from whence he borrowed them.’ The sources of Shakespeare’s plots were very imperfectly known at the time,

so his first editor could not be aware how he had informed the old stories with human interest and poetic value; but there is a modicum of truth in Rowe's stricture: 'It is not in this province of the drama that the strength and mastery of Shakespeare lay, so I shall not undertake the tedious and ill-natured trouble to point out the several faults he was guilty of.' It is a pity that he did not, for it would be interesting to know how the technical art of the great dramatist struck a fellow craftsman who was also an accomplished playwright.

Personally, Mr. Rowe was an agreeable man. Pope was much attached to him, and in one of his letters, 1713, says: 'There is a vivacity and gaiety of disposition almost peculiar to him, which renders it impossible to part from him without the uneasiness and chagrin which generally succeeds all great pleasures.'

A second edition of Rowe's Shakespeare was called for in 1714. This was in nine volumes, eleven years before Pope's edition was published. He died in 1718, in his forty-second year, too soon to take part in the lively war of words inaugurated in 1726 by Theobald's review of Pope's edition, and continued with brief intermissions, while ammunition was gathered, till the end of the century.

#### ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744)

It is a tribute to the universality of Shakespeare's genius that his work attracted so much attention in the eighteenth century, for it was an age the spirit of which was opposed to the force and enthusiasm of his method and to his independence of classic models. It was an age of ordered life and rational conduct, and he, as a great romanticist, seems to have been guided by the rule of romance that 'from rational conduct there is nothing to be expected of a touching, instructive, or amusing

nature.' Lear and Hamlet and Macbeth and Othello are not prudent, well-conducted persons. They are governed by irrational emotions. That makes them interesting, even when, as in the case of Macbeth, the emotions are not rooted in nobility of impulse. The plots of *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream* are based on the most wildly improbable incidents, and the conduct of the characters is entirely opposed to the eighteenth-century theory of life. Nevertheless, edition after edition of the plays was called for from 1709 to 1800, and the two chief literary men of the time, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, are responsible for two of them. They undertook a task entirely foreign to their conception of literature, and were not actuated solely by the desire for gain, but by the sense that they were connecting their names with a far greater one. Pope writes in 1722, 'I am very busy in doing justice to a far greater poet.'

Pope was not very well qualified to be a Shakespearian editor. It is true he had a very delicate perception of the value of words, and a trained and accurate ear for metre, with perhaps a better perception of accent than of rhythm. But he had neither the health nor the patience for the long and careful work necessary to the examination of the original texts, nor sufficient mastery of the Elizabethan vocabulary to guide his judgment. The true object of editing, to produce a text as near like the original words of the author as possible and to explain obscure passages by marginal glossary or comment, was not at all understood in his day. The aim was to modernize the text by emendation, for the English speech had developed so rapidly in the seventeenth century that many expressions in the folio were as obsolete then as they are now. In consequence Pope took many unwarrantable liberties, and thereby laid himself open

to the attacks of Theobald, the next editor. In some instances his guesses were illuminating and ingenious. The excellent one of ‘south’ for ‘sound,’ in *Twelfth Night*, —

O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet *sound*  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour,—

has already been referred to. In the same play (I, iii), Sir Andrew says of his leg: ‘Ay, ’t is strong and does indifferent well in a *damnd*-coloured stock.’ Pope changed this to ‘flame-coloured,’ and the emendation is generally accepted, though ‘dun-coloured’ has been suggested as the more plausible reading, since stockings of that color are mentioned elsewhere. But Sir Andrew was such a vain and feather-headed fool that conspicuous garments for his legs would have been likely to please him.

Another of Pope’s emendations was in *Henry VI*, Part 1, v, iv. The Duke of York says:—

Speak, Winchester; for boiling choler chokes  
The hollow passage of my *poisoned* voice,  
By sight of these, our baleful enemies.

Pope changed ‘poisoned’ to ‘prisoned.’ This involves the substitution of but one vowel, and strikes the reader as justifiable. But it has not been generally accepted. York has been worked up to a great rage, and might by a bold metaphor speak of his voice as ‘poisoned,’ i. e., venomous and bitter, though he might also say that it was ‘prisoned’ or smothered by boiling anger. As we can get a meaning, not absurdly forced, out of the original, we must let it stand.

As an example of the careful consideration necessary

before an emendation can be received, take the dying speech of Juliet in the folio : —

Yea, noise? then I'll be brief. O happy [*i. e.*, fortunately found] dagger!

This is thy sheath (*stabs herself*) ; there *rust* and let me die.

In the first quarto instead of 'rust' we find 'rest.' Pope, and the other eighteenth-century editors, except Steevens, give 'rest.' The nineteenth-century editors prefer *rust*. The argument is that the first quarto was an unauthoritative issue, as is shown by its many imperfections ; that the second quarto is evidently from a better copy and most likely represents the play from the author's hand, and that 'rust' is a far stronger and more Shakespearean word than 'rest.' This, then, is a case just on the dividing line where the arguments balance. But most lovers of Shakespeare will prefer 'rust.'

An amusing example of the fact that the verbal proprieties of one age may be quite different from those of another is given by an emendation Pope made in *Romeo and Juliet*. The bustling and cheery host, old Capulet, says : —

Welcome, gentlemen ! Ladies that have their *toes*  
Unplagued with corns will have a bout with you.

Pope changed 'toes' to 'feet,' on the ground of the indelicacy of the word. This, in an age that could stand Wycherley's and Congreve's comedies, where the entire plot needs emendation! The change is one of a kind that no conscientious editor should make, because the object of editing is to give us the text as it was, not as anybody thinks it ought to be. The rule is, alter no word of the old copies unless it yields no meaning and is plainly a misprint, and the substituted word is justified by the context or by the ordinary rules of proof-

correcting. For instance, in *Romeo and Juliet*, v, i, Romeo says to the apothecary :—

I pray thy poverty and not thy will.

As he immediately gives the apothecary some money, ‘pray’ is properly changed to ‘pay.’ Were it not for the accompanying action, the reading of the folio would have to stand. Even so, it is not absolutely certain that Shakespeare did not write ‘pray.’ The substitution involving the erasure of a single letter is barely justified. But the first editors of the eighteenth century thought that they had a right to improve the text by guessing, and frequently made ludicrous mistakes.

Pope’s preface is a good piece of work.<sup>1</sup> He takes the ground so generally held in the eighteenth century that the poet was an untutored genius, owing everything to nature, nothing to art, and that he is ‘justly and universally elevated above all other dramatic writers for his characteristic excellences notwithstanding his defects.’ He is impressed by the individuality of the characters :—

His characters are so much nature herself that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her.

Every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself ; it is as impossible to find any two alike ; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of characters we must add the wonderful preservation of it ; which is such throughout his plays that had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker.

<sup>1</sup> The introductions of Rowe, Pope, Johnson, Steevens, Capell, and Malone can be conveniently come at either in Malone’s *Variorum Edition* or in *Eighteenth Century Shakespearean Essays* or in *Famous Introductions to Shakespeare’s Plays*.

This power did not enable Pope to correct the misapplication of speeches, or, at least, he did not exert it. He speaks of Shakespeare's power of rousing our feelings whether of amusement or sympathy, of his 'justness of distinction' and 'extent of comprehension when he treats of ethic or politic'; he notices that 'not only the spirit, but manners of the Romans are exactly drawn, and still a nicer distinction is shown between the manners in the time of Julius Cæsar and Coriolanus.' He vindicates Shakespeare's acquaintance with literature, and says 'there is a vast difference between learning and languages.' He thinks he made use of Chaucer in *Troilus and Cressida*, an opinion which will hardly be shared by any one who has noticed the profound difference between the characterization of Cressida in Chaucer's poem and in that singular medley of irony, cynicism, and philosophy, called *Troilus and Cressida* in the First Folio. He says very justly:—

I make no doubt to declare that those wretched plays *Pericles*, *Locrine*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Lord Cromwell*, *The Puritan*, and *London Prodigal*, and a thing called *The Double Falsehood* cannot be admitted as his, if I may judge from all the distinguishing marks of his style and his manner of thinking and writing.

In this modern criticism would sustain him, except as to parts of *Pericles*. Unfortunately Pope lessens our admiration of his literary judgment by adding:—

And I should conjecture of some of the others (particularly *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *Titus Andronicus*), that only some characters, single scenes, or, perhaps, a few particular passages were of his hand.

*Love's Labour's Lost* is as plainly by the youthful

Shakespeare as *Winter's Tale* is by the Shakespeare who had developed into the master-poet.

He errs, too, in considering that Shakespeare wrote for unrefined audiences, because the theatre at Blackfriars, at least, was frequented by audiences above the average of the day in cultivation and appreciation, audiences every way superior to those that heard Dryden's and Congreve's plays, because they were drawn from a superior England, and came to see more natural and poetic plays. Of course no eighteenth-century literary man could admit this for an instant, and it must be reckoned to Pope's credit that he says:—

With all his faults and with all the irregularity of his drama, one may look upon his works in comparison with those that are more finished and regular as upon an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture compared with a neat modern building; the latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn. It must be allowed that in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other. It has much the greater variety and much the nobler apartments, though we are often conducted to them by dark, odd, and uncouth passages. Nor does the whole fail to strike us with greater reverence, though many of the parts are childish, ill-placed, and unequal to its grandeur.

Pope adopted the singular device of 'distinguishing the most shining passages by commas in the margins, and where the beauty lay, not in the particulars but in the whole, a star is prefixed to the scene.' This is 'sign-board criticism,' pure and simple, and must have been rather irritating to those whose favorite passages were not starred. As he says, he 'has rather given a proof of his willingness than of his ability to do his author justice.'

No one man could accomplish the immense labor necessary to establishing a standard text, and Pope is

entitled to our thanks if he did little more than call attention to the necessity for the task. As Shakespeare belongs to the world, the true reading must be decided by a world-jury. A certain conjectural emendation occurs to an editor, and he at once becomes an advocate for his guess. Before it is received it must be deliberated on by those who feel no personal interest in that particular reading. The consensus of many minds must be had, and the proper limitations of conjecture established before we have the Cambridge Edition. The task is too great for one man, even were he especially fitted for it.

Pope adopted also the entirely unjustifiable plan of striking out entire passages that seemed to him unworthy of the author. This, as much as anything else, led to the supersession of his edition, after two issues, by that of his successor and critic, Lewis Theobald. He also amended the metre in many cases in accordance with his own feeling for rhythm. This should never be done unless the change is justifiable on other grounds. In *As You Like It* Oliver describes himself as found sleeping by Orlando —

Under an *old* oak whose boughs were mossed with age  
And high top bald with dry antiquity.

Here the word *old* is superfluous to the metre and tautological. Its insertion is an error the compositor might easily fall into. It was properly stricken out by Steevens. But most of Pope's emendations of this sort are rejected.

Pope's underhand efforts to discredit Theobald, the next editor, have been brought to light by the careful researches of Professor Lounsbury in *The Text of Shakespeare*. Pope's inveteracy and subtlety and untruthfulness are incomprehensible, and the man himself

is a more extraordinary compound than any of Shakespeare's characters. He did Theobald harm, but in the end has done himself far more.

**LEWIS THEOBALD (1688-1744)**

Theobald was born a month earlier than Pope and died three months later. He was trained for an attorney, but chose a literary life and was not very successful as a poet or dramatist, though he was an industrious student and became in some respects a learned man. In 1726 he published a review of Pope's edition, entitled in the voluminous language of the day, 'Shakespeare Restored, or Specimens of the many Errors as well Committed as Unamended by Mr. Pope, designed not only to correct the same edition, but to restore the true reading of Shakespeare in all the editions ever yet published.' Pope, who was a sensitive and rather waspish person, did not take this in very good part, and revenged himself personally by making Theobald the hero of the first edition of the *Dunciad* (1728). In 1733 Theobald brought out an edition of the plays, in which he retorted on Pope with great effect. This was the beginning of the Shakespeare controversy lasting through the eighteenth century, in which each editor attacked some of his predecessors with lively personalities. Our eighteenth-century ancestors, though dignified and even pompous in their manners, relieved the tedium of life by a boyish explosiveness of language when they were irritated. They did not sneer in a superior manner, as we do, but indulged in hearty scolding and calling of names, which gave their opponents a chance to get even, unless they were very poorly gifted. This practice no doubt contributed to the 'gayety of nations,' but seems to us very bad manners. One of the mildest of their phrases was to remark that their opponent's work was

'a tissue of mere dotage which scarcely deserves unravelling.' This is in refreshing contrast to the trickle of lukewarm praise with which our literary periodicals 'notice' each new book.

Theobald was in reality the first 'Shakespeare scholar,' and, as he says, his book is 'the first Essay of literal Criticism upon any author in the English tongue.' He made intelligent use of the quartos, and when we remember how meagre was his 'apparatus criticus' — no concordance, a most imperfect glossary, no aid from others except what he could gather from conversation with the 'ingenious Dr. Thirlby' or the 'accurate Mr. Hughes,' we must admire his acuteness and ability. His memory must have been very strong, for, having occasion to illustrate Shakespeare's use of a noun for a verb, as '*knee* his throne,' '*history* his loss,' and the like, he adduces instances from fourteen different plays, and says he 'could stretch out the catalogue to a great extent.' He says he could bring a great number of examples of the reduplication of words, like 'that father *lost, lost* his,' but that he can remember but five off-hand. He illustrates Shakespeare's use of 'whirling' and 'warrant' and several other words with the same copious and ready citations. Many of his emendations of Pope's edition are sanctioned by modern authority. He is not always in the right, — who could be in 194 pages of new matter, involving many minute points? He says of the words of Claudius to Voltimand and Cornelius:

And we here dispatch  
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,  
*For* Bearers of this Greeting,

that 'the word *For* should be *Our*, as giving the address a more kingly tone.' Here, of course, Theobald was wrong, but the canon, 'Never change the words of

the folio when sense can be extracted from the original,' had not been established.

It is in this book that he suggested the famous emendation in Dame Quickly's description of Falstaff's death, from 'a table of green frieze' to 'a [he] babbled of green fields.' Theobald says that in the margin of a copy of the plays belonging to a deceased friend the word *talked* was suggested for *table*, but that he thinks 'babbled' nearer the true reading.

He is not so fortunate in his attempts to correct the metre of the original, a proceeding rarely warranted, and the cause of ridiculous mistakes by some of his successors, especially when they attempted to fill every line out to five feet. Shakespeare's short lines frequently come in with admirable rhythmical effect, and, even if they did not, it is sacrilegious to attempt to patch them. In correcting the pointing Theobald's work is usually excellent, for he had a very clear idea of the relation of clauses. The punctuation of the early copies was largely the work of the printers, and has no sacrosanct character.

The body of Theobald's book is taken up with a consideration of *Hamlet*, but in a closely printed appendix of nearly equal length he considers passages from some twenty other plays. He is rather too ingenious in some of his conjectural readings, but far less inclined to guesswork than many of his successors. His strictures on Pope do not pass much beyond the bounds of courtesy, at least, of critical courtesy. In the introduction he writes : —

I have so great an esteem for Mr. Pope, and so high an opinion of his genius and excellencies, that I beg to be excused from the least intention of derogating from his merits, in this attempt to restore the true reading of Shakespeare. Tho' I confess a veneration, almost rising to idolatry, for the writings

of this inimitable poet, I would be very loth even to do him justice at the expense of that other gentleman's character. But I am persuaded, I shall stand as free from such a charge in the execution of this design, as I am sure in the intention of it, for I am assuming a task here, which this learned editor seems purposely (I was going to say, with too nice a scruple) to have declined.

In the body of the book he says: —

There are many passages of such intolerable carelessness interspersed thro' all the six volumes, that were not a few of Mr. Pope's notes scattered here and there too, I should be induced to believe that the words on the title-page of the first volume — collated and corrected by the former editions, by Mr. Pope — were placed there by the Bookseller to enhance the credit of his edition ; but that he had played false with his editors and never sent him the sheets to revise. . . .

I shall leave these conjectural readings to the arbitrament of better judgments. But I think I may with modesty affirm every one of them to be more just, and better grounded than that espoused by the Editor. . . .

We have already, in the course of these Remarks, conversed with a Place or two which have given reason to presume, that if corrected at all, they could be corrected only by the servants at the press. Here again is a passage so confused, and so indiscriminately printed that it furnishes a strong suspicion of never having been revised by the Editor. Could so nice a judge as Mr. Pope pass over such absurd stuff as is jumbled here together, and not observe a fault that is so plain and palpable ? Correct it with all the editions that I have ever seen except the Quartos of 1637 and 1703, in which the text is likewise shuffled and faulty.

There is nothing in this undeserved nor offensively personal, but Pope was enraged and mortified, and revenged himself, as said before, by making Theobald the hero of the first edition of the *Dunciad* (1728), and by trying to injure him and prevent the sale of his edi-

tion in every underhand way. In the edition of 1743 he gave the place of dishonor to Colley Cibber, as little of a dunce as Theobald, retaining the first disparaging references to 'poor piddling Tibbalds.' Men like Pope, Swift, and Prior were very disdainful of hack writers like Defoe, Dennis, and Theobald, who made a trade of letters, and did not regard them as technically gentlemen, though they themselves were not at all averse to receiving pay for the productions of their pens. Pope even went so far as to endeavor to prevent the publisher, Tonson, from bringing out Theobald's edition two years later. This seems very petty, as the privilege of printing Pope's writings was valuable to Tonson, and Theobald was poor. Tonson excused himself by the plea that he was committed with others and could not withdraw.

Theobald's edition in six volumes came out in 1733. In the seven years since the publication of *Shakespeare Restored* he had become a more thorough critic, and the publication of the *Dunciad* had given him just cause for indignation. He was not in the least cowed, and attacks Pope in a lively manner. A few extracts will show that the war is on :—

The editors [Rowe and Pope] in their sagacity have murdered a joke changing Slender's (*Merry Wives*) words from 'I hope upon familiarity will grow more *contempt*' to 'grow more *content*,' thereby disarming the sentiment of all its salt and humor and disappointing the audience of a reasonable cause of laughter. . . .

The former editors content themselves with words without any reference to meaning. . . .

Mr. Pope follows Mr. Rowe's edition in his errors and omissions. It gives great suspicion that Mr. Pope for the generality took Mr. Rowe's edition for his guide. . . .

'Troubles thee o'er' (*Tempest*) is a foolish reading, which

I believe first got birth in Mr. Pope's two editions of our poet, and I dare say will be buried there in a proper obscurity. '*Trebles thee o'er*' is the proper reading. . . .

These two mere poetical editors can do nothing towards an emendation, even when it is chalked out to their hands. . . .

This scene (*Taming of the Shrew*) Mr. Pope, upon what authority I cannot guess, has made the first of the fifth Act. The consequence is that two unpardonable absurdities are fixed upon the author which he could not possibly have committed. If such a critick be fit to publish a stage-writer, I shall not envy Mr. Pope's admirers if they applaud his sagacity.

Of Mallet, a defender of Pope, he says:—

I may fairly say of this author as Falstaff does of Poins, 'Hang him, baboon! his wit is as thick as Tewksbury mustard. There is no more conceit [Judgment] in him than is in a *mallet*!'

In the end of the last volume he has an extraordinary lot of indexes, the final one being a list of editions divided into three classes: first, those 'of prime authority,'—the folios and quartos before 1623; second, those 'of middle authority,'—the third folios and the quartos printed after the First Folio; third, 'those of no authority,—Mr. Rowe's and Mr. Pope's editions.'

Theobald's edition of six octavo volumes soon displaced its predecessors, for intelligent men could not help seeing that there was more intelligent work in it. Of his many emendations, nearly one thousand, as large a proportion are received to this day as could be expected.

When Rosalind is entering the Forest of Arden the folio makes her say, 'O, Jupiter, how *merry* are my spirits.' Theobald made the change of 'merry' to 'weary,'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Furness contends adroitly for the retention of 'merry,' but it is not likely that he will find many adherents in one of the very

which is evidently correct from the next speech of Touchstone. ‘I care not for my spirits, if my legs were not *weary*.’

In the same play, however, he makes two very inept corrections, the first and most extraordinary on the suggestion of Warburton. Rosalind says of Orlando, ‘His kissing is as full of sanctity as the touch of holy *bread*.’ Warburton thought this should be ‘holy *beard*.’ Warburton was a clergyman, and thought that to refer to ‘holy bread’ was sacrilegious, but that a critic of the acuteness of Theobald should agree with him is incomprehensible. But in the same play he makes almost as absurd a suggestion: —

*Celia.* He hath bought a pair of cast lips of Diana.

Theobald says ‘cast’ means ‘cast off,’ or second-hand. The word is so plainly the Latin form of ‘chaste’ — *castus* — that it is inconceivable that a scholar like Theobald should fail to perceive it.

In the *Merchant of Venice* Lorenzo says of music: —

Such harmony is in immortal souls ;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Theobald changed ‘souls’ to ‘sounds,’ missing the poetry of the lines. Such misconceptions are rare with him, however, and in many cases he displays a power which may be called divination. No editor has ever surpassed him in so altering an incomprehensible passage that we say at once, ‘That is what Shakespeare wrote.’

In appreciation of lyric poetry Mr. Theobald is weak. In Ariel’s fairy song —

few cases when his judgment does not command instant agreement. Even the ultra-conservative editors of the Globe Edition sanction ‘weary.’

Where the bee sucks, there *suck* I:  
 In a cowslip's bell I lie, . . .  
 On the bat's back I do fly  
 After *summer* merrily.

Merrily, merrily, shall I live now  
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough —

he changes 'summer' to 'sunset' and 'suck' to 'lurk.' This is entirely unjustifiable, not to say impertinent. It is prosaic and spoils the music. Theobald says he changes 'summer' to 'sunset' 'from the known nature of the bat.' But can you hold a great poet in a moment of inspiration responsible for the habits of so nondescript an animal as the bat? He says that fairies do not *suck* honey, whereas they do *lurk*. No man can argue about the habits of fairies with William Shakespeare, who learned all about them when he was a country boy, and 'Queen Mab was with him.'

Theobald's preface<sup>1</sup> shows him an ardent admirer of the poet. He says: —

If his diction and the clothing of his thoughts attract us, how much more must we be charmed with the richness and variety of his images and ideas! If his images and ideas steal into our souls and strike upon our fancy, how much are they improved in price when we come to reflect with what propriety and justness they are applied to character! If we look into his characters and how they are furnished and proportioned to the employment he cuts out for them, how are we taken up with the mastery of his portraits! What draughts of nature! What variety of originals, and how different each from the other! How are they dressed from the stores of his own luxurious imagination, without being the apes of mode, or borrowing from any foreign wardrobe!

Theobald adds little to the life of Shakespeare; his

<sup>1</sup> Reference is had to the preface to the second edition (1740).

researches did not lie in that direction. He says: 'As I have never proposed to dilate further on the character of my author than was necessary to explain the nature and use of this edition, I shall proceed to consider him as a genius in possession of an everlasting fame.' That is about all an eighteenth-century critic could do. His task was to settle, or to help to settle, the correct reading. To us the more interesting question is, why is he 'in possession of an everlasting fame'? Why, in an age full of men of facile talent, when plays were at once salable and a shrewd old fox of business like Philip Henslowe was ready to buy them for cash, and at least forty young men had the knack of writing plays, some four hundred of which have survived to our time,—why in such an age were no other plays produced which are in a class with the fifteen or sixteen of Shakespeare's best ones? Why is it that of the hundred thousand men in our country who can quote long passages from his plays and read some of them every year or so, not more than twenty-five could give the plot of an Elizabethan play not his? The rest may possibly be able to recall the names of one or more of his contemporaries — useless lumber stored during student days to be ejected as soon as possible. Why is it that audiences will listen with interest to certain plays written three hundred years ago, when they would not for an instant

brook a line  
Of tedious though well-laboured *Catiline*?

Where is the difference which causes such opposite effects? This is the interesting question to us, but it was not approached till the days of Coleridge. Generalities as to diction, images, characters, such as are suggested by Theobald, are not explanations or ana-

lyses. They only push the question one step further back and take it for granted that Shakespeare is 'the possessor of an everlasting fame,' which indeed was self-evident.

The same inadequacy of judgment is evident when Theobald speaks of the everlasting question of nature and art applied to a poet. To his generation art meant following certain rules of construction and observing certain canons of taste. The nature of art was not in the least understood, and so they speak of one of the greatest artists in the world as 'lacking art.' They sometimes confounded art and learning, for a poet who did not imitate the technic of the ancients was supposed to be 'without art.'

Theobald lays down an excellent rule when he says :—

Wherever the author's sense is clear and discoverable (though perchance low and trivial), I have not by any innovation tampered with his text, out of an ostentation of endeavoring to make him speak better than the old copies have done.

He deviated from this rule sometimes, but some of his successors ignored it completely, and others could not see where 'the sense was clear and discoverable.'

He pays his compliments to Pope from time to time :—

Mr. Pope pretended to have collated the old copies, and yet seldom has corrected the text but to his injury. I congratulate with the manes of our poet, that this gentleman has been sparing in indulging his private sense, as he phrases it; for he who tampers with an author whom he does not understand, must do it at the expense of his subject. . . .

Mr. Pope, like a most obsequious editor, has taken the passage upon content and followed the track of stupidity. . . .

It is not with any secret pleasure that I so frequently animadvert on Mr. Pope as a critick, but there are provoca-

tions which a man can never quite forget. His libels have been thrown out with so much inveteracy, that, not to dispute whether they should come from a Christian, they leave it a question whether they could come from a man. . . . The indignation for being represented as a blockhead may be as strong in us as it is in the ladies for a reflection on their beauties. It is certain, I am indebted to him for some flagrant civilities, and I shall willingly devote a part of my life to the honest endeavor of quitting scores: with this exception, however, that I will not return these civilities in his proper strain, but confine myself, at least, to the limits of common decency.

Fortunately for Pope, Theobald's satirical powers were not as highly developed as his own. Theobald had sufficient advantage in knowledge of his subject, industry in collecting the evidence for both sides of a disputed reading, and enough sagacity to form an opinion, usually a correct one. It is unfortunate that he did not ignore Pope altogether and devote himself entirely to Shakespearean criticism. However, it may be that literary quarrels call the attention of the public to the subject. The eighteenth-century personalities may have given a zest to the study of Shakespeare, which it lacks in these days of decorum and indifference. Still, there can be little doubt that the sneers of Pope and his friends at textual criticism, as the petty employment of dull and plodding minds, was of material injury to Theobald, and retarded the work of settling the proper reading of the text, which he did so much to further.

#### SIR THOMAS HANMER (1667-1746)

Sir Thomas Hanmer, the next editor of Shakespeare, was a man of family and position, and the Speaker of the House of Commons from 1714 to 1727. He pos-

sessed excellent abilities, and took to annotating the plays for his own pleasure. In 1744 he brought out a very beautiful edition of Shakespeare's works in six volumes, under the auspices of the University of Oxford. It is commonly known as the Oxford Edition, and may be regarded as the admission of the great poet among the classics by the learned world, though the contention that he was a barbaric and uncultured genius was not terminated for some years. It was illustrated with a number of engravings. Sir Thomas is altogether too dignified a person to take part in the quarrels of the early editors, and carries the idea that editing Shakespeare is the work of elegant leisure rather than the serious vocation of life. He follows Pope in degrading to the bottom of the page passages which seem low or undignified, on the ground that they were 'foisted in by the players after his death to please the vulgar audiences.' If this could be proved, excision might be justified; but as proof is out of the question, no one should mutilate the text at his pleasure. The editor struck out the conversation in *Henry V* between the French princess and her gentlewoman, which, though not particularly witty, is amusing enough as such things go, and stands in the original. He seems to have thought that it was undignified in the daughter of a king to be entertaining. He made a few emendations which have been accepted, but many that are inadmissible. His familiarity with hunting terms enabled him to point out that *him* in one passage was a misprint for *lym* (an old word meaning hound), and thereby restore the sense. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* the host says, 'It's a merry Knight, will you go, *An-heires?*' Hanmer suggested *Minheires* (*Mynheers*), which seems plausible enough, though not accepted by the Cambridge editors.

## WILLIAM WARBURTON (1698-1779)

Warburton was a clergyman, and finally became Bishop of Gloucester. He was a man of fine abilities but of an arrogant nature, and entirely unfitted to edit Shakespeare, not only by reason of lack of delicate perception, but because he was so insufferably sure that his own ideas were right. He was at first a correspondent of Theobald's, and attacked Pope on account of the deistical doctrines in the *Essay on Man*. Afterwards he accused Theobald of appropriating some corrections he had communicated to him confidentially, and took Pope's side in the quarrel between him and Theobald. He is of no authority in Shakespearean criticism, and his edition, 1747, merely proves the increasing demand for the poet's works. His emendations, now discredited, with very few exceptions, are so bad that one or two of them are given to show what absurdities an able man may promulgate when he attempts to correct poetry and lacks poetic conception. The most preposterous one, 'beard' for 'bread,' has already been given (page 100), and was adopted by Theobald, who, fortunately for his own reputation, gave Warburton credit. Of the line in Hamlet's second soliloquy, —

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, —

Warburton says, 'Without question, Shakespeare wrote, 'against assail of troubles.' Why not 'assault of troubles,' or '*a siege of troubles*,' or any other word containing an *s*? Either kills the poetry as effectually as does 'assail.'

In *As You Like It* Celia says to Orlando:—

If you saw yourself with your eyes, or knew yourself with your judgement, the fear of your adventure would counsel you to a more equal enterprise.

This is as plain as ordinary conversation need be, but Warburton says, ‘Absurd; we must read *our eyes* and *our judgment*.’ No good reason can be given for the change. Had Celia meant, ‘If you could see yourself as we see you,’ she would have said so. As it is, the emphasis is not on ‘your,’ but on ‘eyes’ and ‘judgment.’

Later, the Duke asks Orlando if he believed in what Rosalind (disguised as a boy) had promised. Orlando says very neatly:—

I sometimes do believe and sometimes do not,  
As those that fear they hope and know they fear.

Warburton’s note is: ‘This strange nonsense should read:—

‘As those that fear *their hap* and know *their fear*.’

This is not even paraphrasing. To paraphrase would be to write, ‘As those who are apprehensive lest their hope prove vain and are sure they are excited’;—as Orlando might well be.

Warburton pays his respects to Theobald and Hanmer in good old eighteenth-century fashion. Theobald, he says, was

a poor man and Hanmer a poor critic, . . . to each of them I communicated a great number of observations which they managed, as they saw fit, to the relief of their several distresses. Theobald generally exerts his conjectural talent in the wrong place: he tampers with what is found in the common books, and in the old ones, omits all notice of variations, the sense of which he did not understand. What he read he could transcribe; but as to what he thought, if he ever thought, he could but ill express, so he read on and by that means got a character for learning. . . .

How the Oxford editor came to think himself qualified for this office, from which the whole course of his life had been so remote, is still more difficult to conceive. For what-

ever parts he might have either of genius or erudition, he was absolutely ignorant of the art of criticism, as well as of the poetry of that time, and the language of his author.

This was in the Augustan age, the age of Queen Anne, when letters were polite' and littérateurs not, and clergymen were only partially reformed and believed in the original sin of those who did not agree with them.

The ineptitude of many of Warburton's notes passes belief, and is one of the reasons for the dislike felt for a century by the lovers of the dramatist for textual critics. The following are no more than fair specimens :

*Macbeth.*

Time and the hour *runs* through the roughest day.

Time is painted with an hour-glass. This occasioned the expression.

*Merchant of Venice.*

*Launcelot.* The old proverb is very well parted between my master, Shylock, and you, sir. You have the grace of God, and he has enough.

*Bassanio.* Thou speak'st it well.

I should choose to read, *thou splitt'st it well.*

*Othello.*

*Iago.* Not poppy nor mandragora,

Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,

Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep

Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

*Ow'dst* is right and of much greater force than the common reading *hadst*, not to sleep being finely called *defrauding the day of a debt of nature*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In another place Warburton says, 'the cocles of the heart should be muscles of the heart, one shell-fish mistaken for another' !

*1 Henry IV.*

*Hotspur.* By this hand, if I were now by this rascal, I could brain him with his lady's fan.

The fans then in fashion *had very long handles.*

*All's Well that Ends Well.*

*Helena.* How shall they credit

A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,  
Embowelled of their doctrine, have left off  
The danger to itself.

*Embowelled of doctrine* plainly means ‘having exhausted all their learning or skill,’ but Dr. Warburton says, —

The expression is beautifully satirical, and implies that the theories of the school are *spun out of the bowels of the professors* [as this note is from Dr. Warburton’s viscera], like the cobwebs of the spider.

Dr. Warburton found his Theobald in Thomas Edwards (1699–1757). Edwards was a barrister and a man of excellent wit.<sup>1</sup> His *Canons of Criticism*, devoted entirely to Warburton’s shortcomings, is nearly always right, for he invariably contradicts Warburton, who is nearly always wrong. He first lays down twenty-five canons, and then illustrates each from Warburton’s notes. Some of Edwards’s ironical rules are: —

1. A professed critic has a right to declare that his author wrote whatever he thinks he ought to have written, with as much positiveness as if he had been at his elbow.
2. He has a right to alter any passage which he does not understand.
3. These alterations he may make in spite of the exactness of measure.

<sup>1</sup> The wittiest of all commentators, for Steevens is a sardonic practical joker, and Dr Furness’s comments in summing the opinions on a knotty point of interpretation are humorous rather than witty.

4. When he does not like an expression and cannot mend it he may abuse the author for it.
5. Or he may condemn it as a foolish expression.
6. As every author is to be corrected into all possible perfection, and of that perfection the professed critic is the sole judge, he may alter any word or phrase which does not want amendment, or which will do, provided he can think of anything which he imagines will do better.

The other canons cover every possible fault a critic can be guilty of. A few examples will show with what good sense and caustic wit Mr. Edwards points out Warburton's mistakes.

*Canon II. Example 33. Twelfth Night.*

It is silly sooth  
And dallies with the innocence of love  
Like the old age.

'It is a plain old song,' says Shakespeare; has the simplicity of the ancients, and dallies with the innocence of love; *i. e.*, sports and plays innocently with a love subject, as they did in old times.

But Mr. Warburton, who is here out of his element, and on a subject not dreamt of in his philosophy, pronounces peremptorily: —

‘Dallies has no sense; we should read *tallies*.’ Spoken more like a baker or a milkman than a lover. — EDWARDS.

*Canon II. Example 37. Measure for Measure.*

For all thy blessed youth becomes as aged.

Warburton says, ‘Read “for palled, thy blazed youth becomes assuaged.”’ The reason for this alteration is worthy of the critic by profession, who not finding in his author what to censure first corrupts under pretence of amending him, and then abuses him for the imputed sentiment. — EDWARDS.

*Canon V. Example 7. Hamlet.*

That father lost, lost his.

Mr. Warburton's reason for believing that the beauty of redoubling the word *lost*, is easier to be conceived than explained, is, because when it is explained, it amounts to nonsense. An odd reason, this. — EDWARDS.

*Canon VIII. Example 37. Much Ado About Nothing.*

Past the infinite of thought.

Human thought cannot sure be called *infinite* with any kind of figurative propriety. I suppose the true reading was *definite*. — WARBURTON.

Whatever the impropriety of applying this term to finite and even trifling things, the practice is so common that it is almost a shame to quote any proof of it, but I cannot forbear giving one from one of Mr. W.'s own prefaces. — EDWARDS.

*Canon VI. Example 5. Cymbeline.*

The very Gods.

The *very* Gods may indeed signify the Gods themselves, yet I am persuaded the reading is corrupt and that Shakespeare wrote 'the warey Gods,' warey here signifying forewarning — ready to give notice, and not as in its more usual meaning, *cautious, reserved*. — WARBURTON.

Here again it is to be wished that Mr. Warburton had given some authority for using the word in this sense, which, if he had looked for, he might have found at least how to spell it. — EDWARDS.

*Canon VIII. Example 39. 1 Henry IV.*

If I travel but four foot, *by the square* further on foot I shall break my wind.

The thought is humorous and alludes to his bulk, insinuating that his (Falstaff's) legs being four foot asunder, when he advanced four foot this put together made four foot square. — WARBURTON.

According to this rule let us measure the leap of the dancer in the *Winter's Tale*, who 'jumped twelve foot and a half *by the square*,' i. e., twelve foot forward and as much sideways. But whether he did this by jumping in the diagonal, or whether he carried his legs twelve feet and a half asunder, is not very easily determined. . . . By *the square* in both places Shakespeare means nothing more than a common measure, a foot rule (carpenter's square). — EDWARDS.

There is something very modern in the tone and style of Edwards's criticism of criticism. He makes few mistakes in his book. In *Macbeth* the Sergeant says:—

As whence the sun 'gins his *reflection*  
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break.

*Reflection* means the turning back of the sun after the solstice whence, at the equinox, storms were supposed to be engendered, but both Edwards and Warburton take it to mean *reflection of light*. Warburton thinks that storms come from the east when the sun begins to shine; Edwards, that they come from the sky (heaven) 'whence the sun gives his reflection,' or his light and heat, reading 'gives' for 'gins' on the authority of Pope. Both are wrong.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the seventh edition of Edwards's book, published after the author's death (1765), a number of sonnets are found which just miss being excellent social verse. There is also an excursus on spelling reform, entitled the *Trial of the Letter V or Upsilon*, in which Apollo hears the petitions of various letters. The letter N petitions that G may be excluded from the words *foreign* and *sovereign*. A cross-petitions that E and I may be ousted and be put in possession (*sovran*). O enters a complaint against U for intruding in the words *labor*, *honor*, and 'all words ending in *or* derived from the Latines.' This was granted at once, forty-five years before the day of Noah Webster. In fact this eighteenth-century barrister's ideas on spelling are more radical than those of our reformers, except with regard to *ough*, which multi-sonant combination he votes to retain in all its incongruous but time-honored positions.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LATER EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EDITORS

DR. JOHNSON (1709-1784)

WHEN we read Dr. Johnson's prospectus or the introduction to his edition of the plays (1765), we feel at once that we are in the grasp of a powerful intellect. There is a dignified march in the opening paragraphs, and a massive good sense in the handling of the subject, that is very impressive. But we soon find that it is an intellect no less limited than powerful, and one strangely unconscious of its limitations. This impression is increased by the notes to the separate plays. When the point can be determined by good sense, when it is a question of the meaning of certain words or the grammatical relation of certain clauses, Dr. Johnson's notes are instructive. He says, 'This must mean so and so,' or 'This is nonsense, I can make nothing of it,' and we are apt to agree with him. But when some necessary question of the play is to be considered, especially anything depending on the vital nature of the characters, this robust intellect is helpless. It is men of this type that have built imperial England. Intellectual integrity, regard for truth, justice, and duty have made Englishmen successful in dealing with Oriental nations. But at the same time a peculiar inability to take the sympathetic and imaginative point of view prevents them from comprehending the inner life of alien races, so that sometimes, as in India and Egypt, England, though a beneficent, is a hated power, and a mutiny may arise and the English officials be entirely unable to foresee or prevent it. This same unwillingness or inability to understand a

mental condition foreign to insular education, and an absolute certainty that the individual's point of view is the correct and only one, characterizes Dr. Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare.

Dr. Johnson was a scholar, a moralist, and a literary man, but his scholarship was almost entirely confined to the classics and the Latin element of our language, his philosophy was dogmatic and rested on arbitrary assumptions, and his knowledge of literature did not cover the intimate acquaintance with the writings of the Elizabethan period his task demanded. It is a tribute to the estimation in which Shakespeare's plays were held that the two leading literary men of their respective generations should be chosen to edit them. Dr. Johnson was a conscientious worker, but at the period (1756) when he undertook to bring out an edition of Shakespeare he was beginning to grow old and weary, and was inclined to procrastinate, so much so that he had to be sharply reminded of his duty. Very likely he had underestimated the immense labor necessary for the minute examination of each line and the collation of the quartos with the First Folio. He laid down the excellent rule that 'the old books were probably right,' and that 'conjecture should not be substituted unless justified by probability.' On the whole, his edition was a disappointment, even in his own day.

Dr. Johnson was not a poet, and it is only through the poet in us that we can appreciate Shakespeare. He hated romanticism or any tendency to give an air of mystery or a tone of enthusiasm or passion to a literary representation of life. He could see nothing in Gray's Odes or Milton's *Lycidas*. They were too spectacular, and conveyed no definite moral. For him the poet must hold a mirror up to nature, but it must not be a magic mirror — it must be destitute of the first quality for

a poetic reflection. His ear was trained to classic scansion and the regular beat of Pope's verse, and deaf to the finer melodies of his own tongue. He could even say that there 'were not more than five or at least six perfect lines in Shakespeare.' His criticism was vitiated by the pernicious idea that poetry must convey some definite lesson in morals, of which the poet himself is conscious; and, by morals, he means the conventional, established standard of social equity, not the underlying principles of justice and love existing from the beginning.

Under these circumstances it may be wondered at that he could see anything good in Shakespeare at all, and it may be that his recognition is a very high tribute to the universality of the poet. But Shakespeare by this time had become an English institution. His plays had been presented for nearly a hundred years by a succession of great actors. Dr. Johnson had repeatedly seen Garrick in the great tragedies. The representations were a part of the life of London. Dr. Johnson had not the slightest idea of their significance, but they were English and established and respectable. He could even tolerate *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for the fairies, though 'wild and fantastical,' were also an established English institution. He says, in one of the oddest sentences ever penned : 'wild and fantastical as this play is, all the parts in their various modes are well written, and give the kind of pleasure which the author designed. Fairies in his time were much in fashion; common tradition had made them familiar, and Spenser's poem had made them great.'

'Fairies were much in fashion' is an extraordinary statement. In fact, the entire passage is utterly incomprehensible. What has the *Faerie Queene* to do with Cobweb and Peaseblossom?

He seems to have regarded the Shakespearean characters as stage figures, not as real people. This may have been the attitude of most of his contemporaries, for the human nature and individuality of Shakespeare's characters is not what first attracts attention. This is most noticeable in the case of the women of the plays. The dignity, purity, vivacity, and charm which attract us so powerfully in Viola, Portia, Imogen, Rosalind, and Beatrice, were not noticed by any one before the last quarter of the eighteenth century. This is surprising, and shows the great value of Shakespearean criticism, for to know such women 'is a liberal education.' Dr. Johnson was blind to the chief beauty in the book he was commenting on. For instance, he says of our charming Viola, 'when she determines to seek service with the Duke Orsino, Viola is an excellent schemer, never at a loss.'<sup>1</sup> As American college students say, 'We cannot stand for that.' Viola is a type of something most sacred to every man, — the maiden. In her distress she is obliged to seek the first means of livelihood available, and, as she cannot find service with Olivia, she is obliged to disguise herself as a boy and enter Orsino's household. Granting that she is a trifle sentimental and falls in love very promptly, we must remember that things must move rapidly in a play, even if the limit of twenty-four hours is disregarded. Besides, Orsino is an attractive person, — a gentleman. Olivia says : —

. . . I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,  
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth ;  
In voices well divulged, free, learned, and valiant,

<sup>1</sup> In *Literature of Europe*, Mr. Hallam, a man of something the same solid density, says the same thing of Viola. Campbell calls the high-spirited, witty Beatrice 'an odious creature.' These things are 'all long ago.'

And in dimension and the shape of nature  
A gracious person.

It is a crude and cruel slander to say that Viola was attracted by the ‘great estate.’

Dr. Johnson failed to see the charm and dignity of Imogen, and says of the play:—

To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism on unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.’<sup>1</sup>

That is like the irruption of an elephant into a flower garden,—an intelligent and dignified beast out of his sphere.

The heresy that a play must teach some definite maxim in social morals runs through much of Dr. Johnson’s criticism. Of *Twelfth Night* he says:—

The marriage of Olivia and the succeeding perplexity, though well enough contrived to divert on the stage, wants credibility, and fails to *produce the proper instruction required in the drama*, as it exhibits no just picture of life.

Of *As You Like It* he says:—

By hastening to the end of his work, Shakespeare suppressed the dialogue between the usurper and the hermit, and

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare’s anachronisms are quite evident. The outside of things he views from the standpoint of an Elizabethan, the inner life, *sub specie aeternitatis*. But he never jumbled the ages as Lodge did in *Wounds of the Civil War*. Lodge takes it for granted that a Gaul is a Frenchman because some Frenchmen are Gauls, and makes the Gaul sent to kill Marius in prison say: ‘Me no dare kill Caius Marius, a Dieu Messieurs, me be dead si je touch Marius.’ Lodge was a scholar, too, a graduate of Oxford.

*lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson*, in which he might have found matter worthy of his highest powers.

Shakespeare knew better than to use his poetry like ‘a stalking horse, and under the presentation of that to shoot his’ sermons. He ‘exhibits his moral lessons,’ just as life does, in the warp and woof of the web.

Of *Lear* Dr. Johnson says:—

But though this moral [that crime begets crime] be incidentally enforced, Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of the chronicles. . . . A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of life; but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded that the observation of justice makes a play worse.

He therefore gives the preference to Tait’s version of *Lear*, where Cordelia marries Edgar and Lear dances at the wedding. Doubtless our feelings when Lear hangs over the dead body of Cordelia are poignant, and we rebel against so cruel a fate, but it had to be. It is the logical outcome of hers and her father’s characters. People sometimes by good luck escape the consequences of pride and folly, but these did not. ‘The wonder is he hath endured so long.’ Besides, what Dr. Johnson overlooks, ‘the wicked’ did not ‘prosper.’ The five wicked people all die before Lear, and three good ones survive.

Dr. Johnson overlooks another case, when the dramatist ‘lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson.’ Falstaff is behind the scene in *Henry V*. He might have been brought in a chair by Bardolph and Pistol, and have made his death-bed repentance to a clergyman

of the Established Church, and departed, if not in the odor of sanctity, at least in an impressive and moral manner. Shakespeare could have written the scene in half an hour, and have made it acceptable to the audience by concealing the fact that it was a moral lesson. He had promised in the epilogue to *Henry IV*, Part 2, to bring the old knight on the stage again. But it would have been a grave artistic error to do so, for it would have distracted attention from the central figure, 'that Star of Eugland,' and from the hero, the English army, so admirably presented in its component parts, the Englishman, the Welshman, and the Irishman, with the Scotchman,—hereafter to prove its main-stay,—just on the outskirts. A 'necessary question of the play is to be considered,' and Sir John cannot be allowed to occupy the centre of the stage and distort the action.

The stern virtue of the moralist is, however, sensible of the attraction of Falstaff. He exclaims:—

But Falstaff! unimitated, unimitable Falstaff! how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be admired but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised but hardly detested? . . . Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety, by an unfailing power of exciting laughter, which is the more freely indulged as his wit is not of the splendid or ambitious kind, but consists in easy scapes and sallies of levity, which make sport, but raise no envy. It must be observed, that he is stained with no enormous or sanguinary crimes, so that his licentiousness is not so offensive but that it may be borne for his mirth.

Remembering, suddenly, his duty to society, the Doctor comes about, and concludes:—

The moral to be drawn from this representation is that no

man is more dangerous than he that, with a will to corrupt, hath the power to please ; and that neither wit nor honesty ought to think themselves safe with such a companion when they see Henry seduced by Falstaff.

In his preface, Dr. Johnson assumes without question Shakespeare's power. He notes that—

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed and every action quickened or retarded. . . . But love is only one of many passions, and as it has no great influence on the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.

The critic probably refers to the tragedies, for it is only in *Romeo and Juliet* that love is the sole motive force. In the comedies love, vanity, egotism, whim — everything that is mingled in the kindly view of life, contributes to our pleasure. Avarice and loyalty to race make Shylock a more dramatic figure than Portia. In *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello* love is the impelling power, but it plays a very subordinate part in *Hamlet*, and is absent from *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Timon*. Shakespeare estimated all passions at their relative value ; ambition, revenge, avarice, and intellectual pride are not exaggerated as they are by Marlowe, but the threads in the tangled web of human life are unraveled and then woven into a coherent fabric, as men wove it in his day, and do in ours when they are most men.

Dr. Johnson comments on the stricture that 'Shakespeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition.' He admits :—

That . . . this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed ; but *there is always an appeal from criticism to nature*. The end of writing is to instruct,<sup>1</sup> the end of poetry is to *instruct by pleasing*. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alterations of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life.

He fails to appreciate the nature of the Shakespearean tragedy, as every one did till the day of Coleridge and Schlegel. He makes the extraordinary statement that the dramatist is weak in narration, forgetting Prospero's story to Miranda, Horatio's talk with the guardsmen, and many other passages where the situation is placed before us by narrative conversation of a dramatic quality. He forgets that the absence of scenery necessitated on the Elizabethan stage descriptive passages to create an illusion. He declares that 'his declarations or set speeches are weak.' Could he ever have read *Julius Cæsar* or *Othello*? He says, with more justice, that a 'quibble [pun] is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller ; he follows it at all adventures — it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire.' He forgets that when punning was first invented its attraction was irresistible, and that at least one of the dramatists was a worse punster than Shakespeare. He points out that the poet was not strong in the construction of final acts of his plays. He defends Shakespeare for the violation of the unities, partly, perhaps, because Voltaire had attacked him so venomously ; for Dr. Johnson was by

<sup>1</sup> True enough, but not in the sense Dr. Johnson takes it. Instruct, *instruere*, to build up in the mind general conceptions of beauty and truth, not to teach arithmetic or the catechism 'by pleasing.'

nature a conservative classicist. His argument on this point is a model of cogency. He admits that he is ‘almost frightened by my own temerity ; and when I estimate the fame and strength of those that maintain the contrary opinion I am ready to sink down in reverential silence,’ an attitude so foreign to his position before other men that we can understand how deeply rooted in the minds of critics was the belief that the unities were essential to a tragedy. Dr. Johnson writes : —

The objection [to change of scene] arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes, that when the play opens, the spectator really believes himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more. He that can take the stage at one time for the palace of the Ptolemies, may take it in half an hour for the promontory of Actium. . . . The drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions, and why may not the second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first, if it be so connected with it that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene ?

His argument ought to have been enough entirely to destroy the slavish regard for the unities, already much weakened. His predecessors had excused Shakespeare, on the plea of his ignorance and the lack of taste in his audiences. Dr. Johnson defends him, on the ground of the essential nature of dramatic illusion. Shakespeare’s tragedies fulfilled the essential requirement ; they held the attention of the audience when acted, and they delighted the most cultivated part of the audience when well acted. Dr. Johnson might have added, ‘If the spectators were willing to accept an English boy in female attire as the Queen of Egypt, no greater strain

would be superinduced on their imaginations by considering a platform in London to be in succession the palace of the Ptolemies in Alexandria and the hall of the imperial Cæsars in Rome.'

His comparison between Shakespeare and the regular writers is marked by the same victorious common sense : —

The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades and scented with flowers : the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and roses ; filling the eye with awful pomp and gratifying the mind with endless diversity.

There is still here a suggestion of the old heresy that Shakespeare 'lacked art,' which really meant that he lacked artificiality ; but had Dr. Johnson noticed that the forest was far more germane to the spirit of man than the garden, he would have left little to be desired in the way of appreciation.

The great moralist lacked the quickness of apprehension necessary to amend the dark places in the text, — indeed, some places that are quite clear seemed dark to him. For instance, Lear says : —

Dear daughter, I confess that I am old ;  
Age is unnecessary. On my knees I beg . . .

Dr. Johnson says the meaning of 'Age is unnecessary' is 'Old age has few wants,' whereas the reader feels at once that the speech is bitterly ironical, and the expression in question means that old men are superfluous or useless. Again, in *Merry Wives*, v, v, Falstaff says, 'Ignorance itself is a *plummet* over me.'

The word 'plummet' Dr. Johnson says should be 'plume.' The exact meaning of this passage is obscure, but it is difficult to see how 'plume' enlightens it. Falstaff may mean, I am so shallow that ignorance can sound me with a plummet, or, ignorance can hold a plumb line to rectify my errors. The difficulty lies in the word 'over.'

In *As You Like It* Silvius says to Phebe,—

Will you sterner be

Than he that dies and lives by bloody drops?

This passage gave a great deal of trouble to early commentators, though it is evident, as Silvius had a few lines before spoken of an executioner, that the meaning is 'Will you be more cold-hearted than a man who lives and dies by a bloody trade?' 'Lives and dies' is equivalent to 'gains his living by,' or 'passes his life in,' and is so used now. Dr. Johnson said it should read—

Will you sterner be

Than he that dyes his lips by bloody drops?

For this change no good reason can be given. The trouble probably arises from the fact that either Shakespeare or the printer carelessly transposed 'lives and dies' into 'dies and lives.'

Dr. Johnson illustrates well the prosaic and literal tendency of the eighteenth century. In common with several others he is determined to find a logical sequence of thought in the fooling of the clowns, and rehashes Launce's soliloquy in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Wit in a man like Benedick has a substratum of sense, but wit in a rattlebrain skips over the surface of thought, touching it here and there, with only the most airy connection of ideas, and frequently none at all. This a man like Dr. Johnson cannot understand. He tries to turn nonsense into his idea of sense, and comic poetry into prose.

In interpreting passages where analysis only is needed, Dr. Johnson is much more successful, and, of course, his other emendations are not always as absurd as those cited, though he is not credited with any of the notable ones. He laid down in his admirable prefatory essay the sound rule to 'adhere to the old books' and avoid conjecture unless buttressed by evidence. Unfortunately, he did not always adhere to this rule. His name is inseparably connected with that of Shakespeare. His edition, reëdited by Steevens and Reed, and republished in this country many times, was the one from which our fathers learned the plays. In particular, many persons will remember the seventeen brown octavos of 1809, in which they first read the plays fifty years ago.

His edition was venomously attacked by a man named Kendrick, who is mentioned in Goldsmith's *Retaliation*, but Dr. Johnson was too dignified a person to pay any attention to criticism, and Kendrick had not learning or ability enough to cause him any uneasiness. Besides, Dr. Johnson's theory was that to notice critics was the only way to give them any importance. 'Depend upon it, sir,' he said, 'no man was ever written down but by himself.' He failed entirely to appreciate Theobald, who entered into the spirit of the plays so much more fully than he could, and said to his friend, Dr. Burney: 'Warburton would make two-and-fifty Theobalds cut into slices.' He added, however, 'The worst of Warburton is that he has a rage for saying something when there is nothing to be said,' which certainly would not apply to Theobald, who always makes his point. With Steevens, the next editor who republished and amplified Johnson's edition, he was on the best of terms, and made him a member of the Literary Club on the same night that the historian

Gibbon was admitted. Steevens gave life and credit to Johnson's Shakespeare, and, though a very acrimonious person, was careful not to offend his senior. He was, too, a wit and a scholar, and possessed in his conversational power a sure passport to Johnson's favor. Dr. Johnson was equally fortunate in his friends and in his enemies. Had Steevens been among the latter, his work on Shakespeare's plays would have been severely and deservedly criticised.

One point which should be noted in Dr. Johnson's favor is, that when he found a passage unintelligible he did not ignore it, as some of his predecessors had done, but confessed his inability to make it clear. He says: 'To time I have been obliged to resign many passages, which, though I did not understand them, will perhaps hereafter be explained.' 'In many passages I have failed like others; and from many, after all my efforts, I have retreated, and confessed the repulse. I have not passed over, with affected superiority, what is equally difficult to the reader and to myself, but where I could not instruct him have owned my ignorance.'

The great charm of Dr. Johnson as a man is, that he was absolutely honest; there was no affectation about him. This is not an undesirable trait in a critic, though by no means universal.

#### EDWARD CAPELL (1713-1781)

With the exception of Theobald, the editors previously mentioned were amateurs. It was not perceived that a peculiar kind of scholarship, quite as minute and painstaking as that requisite for editing a Greek or Latin text, was called for to collect and arrange the materials and deduce the proper readings, and, even had it been perceived, a generation or two would have passed before such a type could be developed. Con-

jectural readings had been freely and sometimes rashly admitted. Everywhere in England 'ingenious gentlemen' indulged in guesses as to what the author said, and corresponded with one another and with the editors. The editors printed the conjectures if they liked, and each expended a large amount of energy in abusing other editors. Each successively formed his text largely on that of his predecessor, with the exception of Theobald, whom all agreed in regarding as a poor creature, because he argued his points on evidence and was usually right. Rowe had formed his text on the Fourth Folio, with some use of a late quarto, now lost, in the case of *Hamlet*. Pope followed Rowe, with some use of the quartos and more of his own imagination. Theobald was an editor in the true sense. Warburton asserts that he collated the former editions, but Capell, one of the most accurate men that ever lived, says that Warburton based his text on that of Theobald. Dr. Johnson stated the proper rule, but also based his text on that of Theobald. There was no agreement as to editorial method or as to the relative value of the sources, nor was the propriety recognized of giving a former editor credit for his readings when accepted. In this respect Theobald alone seems to have been conscientious, though Warburton accused him of appropriating his notes, a thing he was unlikely to do, as he would have seen that the notes were more discreditable than the theft.

The great editors, Capell, Steevens, and Malone, were scholars in the fullest sense. All of them were men of independent fortunes, and devoted themselves to research from natural bias. Admitting that they possessed something of the specialist's instinct in gathering materials without reference to their value, their industry in gathering materials was unremitting. They ex-

amined the original texts with minute care and printed the conjectural readings in notes at the bottom of the page, so that the court of inquiry of successive generations of scholars could attack the task of settling as far as possible on an accepted text, a task brought well towards a conclusion by the Cambridge editors in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Edward Capell was the most of an old-fashioned 'antiquary' of the three, though Malone was not far behind him. In his ten-volume edition of 1768 he gave disputed readings in footnotes, so that his is the first 'variorum edition.' He revised the division of the plays into acts and scenes, observing carefully the dramatic principle that a scene is a place, though the persons present may change.

He published two books of *Readings in Shakespeare* (bound in one volume as we have it) in 1774, which contained an admirable glossary of obsolete words. This was withdrawn, but republished after his death in three beautiful volumes, the third containing extracts from Elizabethan books which Shakespeare might be supposed to have read, and passages from older books illustrating the plays. Capell's work is strictly Shakespearean scholarship, as distinguished from Shakespearean criticism, and it is impossible to overestimate his industry and conscientiousness. He is said to have transcribed the plays eight times with his own hand. He devised a system of symbols, and he crowded so much into his notes that it is sometimes very difficult to ascertain the point. No one but a most persevering specialist would attempt to decipher his meaning. His long introduction to the plays is one of the most confused pieces of prose in the language. Dr. Johnson said, 'The fellow should have come to me. I would have endowed his purpose with words. As it is, he doth

gabble monstrously.' But the sense and learning of Capell are everywhere evident in his ill-formed sentences.

Capell was too much of a gentleman to engage in the personal controversies that engaged the attention of the other editors (except Dr. Johnson). He alludes to Rowe, Pope, and Theobald as the first, second, and third 'of the moderns.' Like the rest he fails to do justice to Theobald, and he complains that Steevens plagiarized from his edition without giving him credit. He left his Shakespearean collection to the University of Cambridge, and it forms one of its most valued treasures. The editors of the Cambridge Edition (1865) say in their preface that in Capell's copy of the Second Folio, 'annotated in the margin with a multitude of marks in red ink,' — conventional symbols showing how it differs from the First Folio, — which they examined carefully, 'they hardly in a single instance found him wrong.'

#### GEORGE STEEVENS (1736-1800)

Steevens, the next editor, was a man of greater ability than Capell, and of almost equal industry. His life was devoted to Shakespearean scholarship. In 1776 he published twenty of the quartos, being as he supposed the whole number of those printed before the Restoration that had survived. In 1799 he published six old plays, on which Shakespeare had founded *Measure for Measure*, the *Comedy of Errors*, the *Taming of the Shrew*, *King John*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. He says, 'As I have only collected materials for future artists, I consider what I have been doing as no more than an apparatus for their use. . . . My design amounted to no more than a wish to encourage others to think of preserving the oldest editions of the English writers, which are growing scarcer every day, and afford the world all the

assistance or pleasure it can receive from the most authentic copies of its noblest poet.'

In 1773 he assisted Johnson in a new edition of the plays in ten volumes. From this time he worked enthusiastically on his favorite author, a second edition appearing in 1778, a third, in which he was assisted by Isaac Reed, in 1785, and a fourth of fifteen volumes in 1793. The name of Johnson was retained in all these editions, on account of its commercial value. This last was reissued under the superintendence of Mr. Reed, in twenty-one volumes, and is really Steevens's edition. It was reprinted in our country in 1809, and contained besides the plays a volume of *Prolegomena*. The text of 'Johnson and Steevens,' or 'Johnson, Steevens, and Reed,' published in many forms, was read by our fathers and grandfathers up to the middle of the century.

Steevens was too apt to adopt an unauthorized reading for the sake of regulating the versification. Mr. Kemble, the great actor, said, 'he had no ear for the colloquial metre of our old dramatists'; but his knowledge of the costume, the manners, the language, and the superstitions of the time of Shakespeare was very great, and enabled him to explain many obscure passages. He was a man of wit and of a 'sarcastic and mischievous temper,' and has been called the 'Puck of criticism.' He laid traps for other writers on the subject, and, when they fell into one, rejoiced with diabolical glee. He dwelt with minuteness on any allusion to indelicate subjects, and attributed the notes on them to two harmless gentlemen, Collins and Amner, the first a friend of Capell's and the last an exemplary and retiring clergyman. How he managed to escape the penalties of the English law of libel does not appear. He kept up the traditional reputation of Shakespeare's editors by quarreling with Malone, but learned to respect his learning.

It was of him that it was written : ‘When death by one stroke and in one moment makes such a dispersion of knowledge and intellect, when such a man is carried to his grave — the mind can feel but one emotion : we consider the vanity of everything beneath the sun — we perceive what shadows we are and what shadows we pursue.’ The poet Rogers said, with less feeling but more point, ‘So, the old wolf is dead in his den.’ Dr. Johnson, who knew him intimately, said when Beauclerc had declared that he was ‘malignant’: ‘No, Sir, he is not malignant. He is mischievous, if you will. He would do no man an essential injury : he may, indeed, love to make sport of people by vexing their vanity.’ This is perhaps as charitable a judgment as can be made.

One of Steevens’s hoaxes is amusingly described by Mr. Lee in *Shakespeare and the Modern Stage*. In the *Theatrical Review*, a short-lived periodical of 1763, appeared an anonymous biography of Edward Alleyn, the famous actor of Shakespeare’s day. It contained the statement that —

A gentleman of honour and veracity in the commission of the peace for Middlesex has shown us a letter dated in the year 1600, which he assures us has been in the possession of his family by the mother’s side, for a long series of years and which bears all the marks of antiquity.

The letter as printed runs : —

FRIEND MARLE, — I must desyre that my syster hyr watche, and the cookerie book you promysed be sent by the man. I never longed for thy company more than last night ; we were all very merrye at the Globe, when Ned Alleyn did not scruple to affyrme pleasantly to thy friend Will that he had stolen his speech about the qualityes of an actor’s excellencye in *Hamlet* his tragedye, from conversations manyfold and opinions given by Allen which had passed between them

touchinge the subject. Shakespeare did not take this talke in good sorte ; but Jonson put an end to the stryfe with wittilie saying, This affaire needeth no contentione, you stole it from Ned no doubt: do not marvel ; have you not seen him act times without number ?

Believe me most syncerelie

Harrie

Thyne,

G. PEEL.

This is palpably a forgery. The ‘Believe me most sincerely thine’ alone is enough to condemn it, to say nothing of the fact that Peele died in 1598 and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was not played before 1602. But it was copied into the *Annual Register* of 1770, and into *Biographia Literaria* in 1777. It was shown to be clearly spurious in D’Israeli’s *Curiosities of Literature* in 1839, but it has appeared since in the *Academy* of London and in *Poet Lore* in our country. D’Israeli also gives Steevens credit, though without definite proof, for originating the ‘deadly upas tree of Java,’ the effluvia from which ‘spread desolation through a district of twelve or fourteen miles, affording a scene of desolation,’ according to the *London Magazine*, ‘beyond what poets have described or painters delineated.’ It is given there as an ‘extract from the diary of a Dutch traveler,’ who seems to have been as unreal as ‘the gentleman of honour and veracity’ with a ‘family by the mother’s side’ who communicated the letter from ‘G. Peel.’ The ‘deadly upas tree’ was a favorite image for orators in the early part of the nineteenth century when referring to the opposite party, but is now virtually extinct, and, if not Steevens’s invention, is worthy of him.

Mr. Steevens’s preface to his edition of 1793 is full of incisive wit. It is particularly to be noticed how admirably he works quotations from the poet into his

discourse. He discusses the portraits of Shakespeare and the engravings from the Droeshout print, from Rowe's edition, down to Malone's, twelve in number, and remarks in an off-hand manner, 'No two of these portraits are alike, nor does any one of them bear the slightest resemblance to its wretched original.' Such a slapdash judgment lessens our faith in the writer, which is almost demolished by the following extraordinary statement:—

We have not reprinted the Sonnets, etc., of Shakespeare, because the strongest act of Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers into their service, notwithstanding these miscellaneous poems have derived every possible advantage from the literature and judgment of their only intelligent editor, Mr. Malone, whose implements of criticism, like the ivory rake and golden spade of Prudentius, are on this occasion disgraced by the objects of their culture. Had Shakespeare produced no other works than these, his name would have reached us with as little celebrity as time has conferred on that of Thomas Watson, an older and much more elegant sonneteer.

The history of criticism furnishes few more inept judgments than the above. Steevens says of Monck Mason, after praising some of his strictures on a former edition of Shakespeare: 'Mr. M. Mason will also forgive us if we add that a small number of his proposed amendments are suppressed through honest commiseration.' Perhaps Christian charity would have left Mr. Steevens's opinion of the Sonnets in 'its proper obscurity,' for Steevens was a great scholar. His expression was no doubt due to the fact that Malone had edited the Sonnets.

EDMUND MALONE (1741-1812)

The last of the three Shakespearean editors of the latter eighteenth century was an Irishman settled in

London. He was no less industrious than Capell, but more systematic, and, if not so brilliant as Steevens, less opinionated and incisive, and covered more ground in his investigation than either of his great contemporaries. In 1778 he published *An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the Plays of Shakespeare were written*; and in 1780 two volumes, entitled, *Supplemental Observations concerning Brooke's Rendering of the Italian Poem, Romeus and Juliet; Shakespeare's Poems and the Seven Doubtful Plays, including Pericles*. To this was appended an 'Essay on the English Stage,' which he afterwards expanded with minute and accurate learning. In 1790 his edition of the plays and poems was published in ten volumes. This included the historical account above mentioned, and an essay on the relations between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, and a dissertation on the three parts of *Henry VI*.

Malone discovered at Dulwich College, near London, the Memorandum Book of Philip Henslowe, a theatrical business man contemporary with Shakespeare. 'Discovered' is perhaps too strong a word, but Malone's attention having been called to it, he printed considerable extracts from it and was able to settle some dates and questions of authorship. It was edited by Collier for the Shakespeare Society in 1856, but had been much mutilated since Malone used it. It contains entries of the plays acted under Henslowe's management, of the amounts received from the performance, the sums paid to the playwrights, and inventories of apparel and properties, and receipts with the autographs of various dramatists. It is an oddly spelled and confused lot of fragments, but establishes some facts of minor importance. Malone also copied extracts from the Stratford Register, and from the Stationer's

Book — that is, the record of books allowed to be printed — every item he could find that bore directly or indirectly on the life of the poet. He said that he could prove Rowe's life erroneous in many particulars. This he was unable to do, but he corrected some mistakes made by Rowe and added a few insignificant facts. He regarded the First Folio as the prime authority, whereas Steevens gave more credit to the quartos. Relations between Steevens and Malone were strained at one time, but Malone was too accurate and well grounded a commentator to make it safe to attack him. Ritson, it is true, did criticise him in a number of pamphlets for his preference for the First Folio; but Ritson, though far superior to Kendrick, was not strong enough to make any impression on the reputation of a great scholar like Malone.

At his death he left a great number of notes on the text — he was a very careful and tireless collator — and other antiquarian matter relating to Shakespearean questions. These were edited and seen through the press by James Boswell, the son of Dr. Johnson's biographer. The edition is known as 'Malone's Vario-*rūm*,' and is an encyclopædia of all that was known about Shakespeare at the time. The footnotes contain comments and various readings, each credited to the proper author. The first, second, and third volumes (*Prolegomena*) are taken up with the principal writings connected with Shakespeare, prefaces to the former editions, Dr. Farmer's Essay on the learning of Shakespeare, Rowe's life, and an examination by Malone of portions of the First and Second Folios, showing the great superiority of the First in correctness, and accounting for the errors in the Second. He says that the 'editor of the Second Folio, whoever he was, and Mr. Pope are the great corrupters of our poet's text.'

He even says that the Second Folio should never be opened, but Steevens maliciously points out that he had 'admitted 186 corrections from it into his text.' These are for the most part, however, corrections of no importance, or such as any one accustomed to reading proof would make as a matter of course. Malone would admit no conjectural emendations without good collateral evidence. He said that the number of unauthorized emendations in Capell's edition amounted to 972. This can only be justified by counting minor questions of form, such as 'I am' for 'I 'm,' and the like. Capell gave more weight to the quartos than Malone, to whom the First Folio was of prime authority.

Malone was honestly devoted to the task of making a text of Shakespeare as nearly as possible to represent the words written by the master, and was not of a combative disposition, despite his nationality. Steevens was jealous of him and made him the target for witty invective, but Malone's learning and exactness gave him a slight advantage over his adversary, who surpassed him in wit and literary power. There was little of the asperity of the day of Pope, Theobald, and Warburton left. It may be that Malone would not have done as much work as he did had he not been spurred on by the desire to prove Steevens wrong. 'Principles not men' is a sound maxim ethically, but a personal attack arouses Shakespearean commentators to effort — at least it did so in the eighteenth century. It is strange that Shakespeare, the most peaceable of the Elizabethans, should have been the subject of a controversy he would have avoided when living, and that no one should fight over the body of Ben Jonson, who lived in an atmosphere of combat. But our ancestors, French and English, always used the name of a saint for a war-cry.

Malone's accurate knowledge of the Elizabethan

drama enabled him to prove that *Vortigern*, impudently asserted by the author, Ireland, to be a genuine play of Shakespeare's, was a forgery. He detected at once the spurious character of the manuscript poems the poet Chatterton produced and asserted to be of the fourteenth century. Readers of Shakespeare, as well as scholars, owe him a great debt. He can be forgiven for the sacrilege of putting a coat of whitewash on the bust of Shakespeare in the Stratford church, for he had a mania for preserving things over a century old.

After the publication of Malone's *Variorum* and the Johnson-Steevens-Reed edition, the elucidation of Shakespeare's text became more scientific. The sources and the authoritative dissertations were accessible to all. Comparison could readily be made between all suggested readings. The canons of criticism were well established. Futile and licentious conjectures were still made, but they commanded little attention. The commentaries of Seymour and Becket were more absurd than anything that had appeared before, but they were disregarded. A printer, Zachary Jackson, who had corrected a great deal of proof, was able to show how some of the errors in the original texts had originated in mistakes of the compositor. When he steps beyond this narrow province, he falls into ludicrous errors. For instance, quoting Ursula's words in *Much Ado About Nothing*, III, i:—

Signior Benedick,  
For shape, for bearing, argument and valour  
Goes foremost in report through Italy,

Mr. Jackson remarks from the depths of domestic experience:—

Argument is the very worst recommendation to a lady's

love, as it is not only productive of serious quarrels abroad, but also the strongest poison to domestic happiness.

Our author wrote : —

Signior Benedick  
For shape, *forbearing* argument, and valour  
Goes foremost in report through Italy.'

Thus the recommendation is strong, he ever forbears argument in order to avoid dissension: Such endowments, I think could not fail of finding sufficient influence in the heart of Beatrice.

Again, in *Troilus and Cressida*, Alexander says : —

Hector, whose patience  
Is as a virtue fixed, to-day was moved.

Jackson says, —

We should read : —

Hector, whose patience  
Is as a *vulture* fixed, to-day was moved.

Thus the patience of Hector is compared to the Vulture, which never moves from the object of its insatiate gluttony till it has entirely devoured it.

These things belong to the humor of Shakespearean criticism, and need be pursued no further. Even in our own country not many years ago a commentator full of praiseworthy reverence for the First Folio, extending to the most palpable errors of punctuation, interpreted Perdita's words which read : —

O Doricles,  
Your praises are too large ; but that your youth  
And the true blood which peepeth fairly through it,  
Do plainly give you out an unstained shepherd,  
With wisdom, I might fear, my Doricles,  
You woo'd me the false way.

Even with the above original faulty punctuation the construction is plain enough. ‘With wisdom’ qualifies ‘I might fear,’ but the commentator in question insists that ‘with wisdom’ qualifies ‘unstained,’ that Perdita means that her lover is a shepherd untainted with worldly wisdom. That is equal to anything of Warburton’s or Jackson’s.

But common sense has been the rule since the eighteenth century. Discussion is conducted on scientific principles. Research has cleared up many obscure allusions, and every accessible record that could throw any light on the social or theatrical history of the times has been scrutinized. It is possible that some may yet be unearthed which may disclose facts of minor importance. Some one may appear who is possessed of the divining power of Theobald, and solve one or more of the cruxes in a way that shall command immediate assent. The day of patching the text is past, thanks to Capell, Steevens, and Malone.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the editions of Staunton, Singer, Collier, Knight, and Dyce were the work of conscientious scholars. Some of them gave more weight to the First Folio, and some were inclined to regard the quartos as of equal or greater authority. The First Folio and the quartos were reproduced in facsimile, making the originals accessible to all. In 1852 Mr. Collier announced that he had discovered a copy of the Second Folio, copiously annotated in the margin, and that the corrections were apparently made soon after the publication of the book, 1632. If so, the notes would be of high authority, as the writer could have heard the original delivered on the stage by actors who received instructions directly from the mouth of Shakespeare. Great expectations were aroused, but the publication of the volume proved

a disappointment. Experts showed that the notes were in the handwriting of at least two persons, and not necessarily of great antiquity, possibly of the early eighteenth century. Analysis proved that, of the large number of erasures and marginal corrections, many were unimportant, some were anticipated by Theobald, many others were to be found in the First Folio, and the rest were obviously erroneous. Richard Grant White called attention to the fact that the annotator inserted in *Love's Labour's Lost* a stage direction to Biron, 'gets him into a tree,'<sup>1</sup> which could not have been written before 1662, and probably was written much later, since 'practicable' scenery was not introduced on the stage till after that date. Of the 1303 new readings proposed in the notes, he showed that 1013 were palpably inadmissible, and 173 were already received, leaving but 117 as plausible, from which to select such as were satisfactory. None of the really difficult cruxes are explained. It would seem as if the notes were made by some 'ingenious gentleman,' interested in the poet early in the eighteenth century. With the failure of these notes to unlock any of the puzzles, all hopes of a contemporary annotated edition perished.

The great event of the nineteenth century was the publication of the Cambridge Edition, begun under the editorship of George Clark and John Glover and completed under the editorship of Clark and William Aldis Wright. The text is an extremely conservative one, and is prepared with great care. No passage is emended

<sup>1</sup> 'Gets up into a tree' was substituted for 'he stands aside,' by Capell, who was followed by Johnson and Steevens and all editors except those of the Cambridge Edition. This does not in the least weaken Mr. White's argument, in fact strengthens it, for Capell could not have seen the Collier folio, and the annotator might have seen Capell's edition.

simply because it is unintelligible and conjecture may afford a plausible meaning, unless probability favors the change. As an example of a change admitted but just on the line of rejection, in *Romeo and Juliet*, I, i, line 156, Benvolio says that Romeo is

so secret and so close, . . .

As is the bud, bit with an envious worm  
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,  
Or dedicate his beauty to the *same*.

The word 'same' gives a clear meaning, but it is dreadfully commonplace and un-Shakespearean. Theobald proposed: 'And dedicate his beauty to the *sun*', which was followed by all the editors except Malone, and Collier in his first edition. Collier afterwards adopted the reading 'sun' on the authority of the manuscript annotator. The Cambridge Edition reads 'sun,' probably on the ground that the word was originally written 'sunne,' which the compositor could readily mistake for 'same.' There must be an explanation of the mistake. It is not enough that the change improves the poetry.

The Cambridge text is taken as the basis of most of the modern popular editions, whose name is legion.

The Shakespeare scholar editors in our country are Gulian C. Verplanck, whose handsomely illustrated edition came out in 1847, and Richard Grant White, a very excellent though rather opinionated commentator. His first edition was published 1857-65, and his second, in which he receded from some of the readings given in the first, in 1883. This is called the Riverside Edition, and is a beautiful specimen of bookmaking. The monumental Variorum of Dr. Furness is in the course of publication. A large octavo is devoted to each play (two to *Hamlet*). The text is sometimes that of the folio, and sometimes based on that of the Cambridge Edition. Below the text are given all the readings of the authori-

ties and of the principal editors. Beneath are conjectural explanations and suggestions, each credited to its author. In an appendix are treatises on the text, on the date of appearance, copies of rare quartos, reprints of the original stories, and copious extracts from dramatic and literary critics, — a complete Shakespearean library. When this great edition is complete, neither the ordinary reader interested in Shakespearean questions nor the specialist will need any other *apparatus criticus*, for the first can obtain from it all the valuable information he needs, and the second can find full references to the original authorities to be looked up in some great library.

There is, however, no absolutely authoritative text, nor is it likely that there ever will be one, unless a committee of the leading scholars of England, Germany, and America were formed to deliberate, exchange views, and vote on all disputed points. It is not likely that such a body will ever be formed ; and even if it should be, the results of the labors of the revisers of the English Bible give no surety that the decision of the majority would be acceptable to the great body of the lovers of Shakespeare. A great writer cannot be corrected in vital points except by himself. Originality is the mark of his style, and it would be as difficult for the best of his contemporaries to fill out a lapsed line as it is for one of us. We have a text in which many thousands of evident corrections and a few happy conjectural emendations have been made. Shakespeare's works are accessible to all very nearly in the form in which he wrote them. He is substantially intelligible, — that is, as intelligible as any great soul can be to his fellow men. At best, language has its limitations as a medium of communication on the mysterious matters which possessed the poet's consciousness.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ESSAYISTS

MRS. MONTAGU (1720-1800)

BESIDES the criticism contained in the prefaces to the successive editions of the eighteenth century,— which might be supposed to be more favorable than the general judgment of the literary circles,— a number of independent papers had been published dealing with special textual points, and others reflecting the attitude of scholarly cliques. Those of Gildon and Rymer have been mentioned, and the sequence of the others is followed out minutely in Lounsbury's *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*. The opinion that the disregard of classic form and the combining of serious and comic elements in a tragedy were radical faults, grew gradually weaker. The increasing interest taken in the plays as poetry, and the sustained interest taken in their presentation, were too strong arguments for the advocates of classic theory. The attack by Voltaire on the English dramatist as a wild barbarian, in the first half of the century, in itself vicious and unreasonable, was represented as an arraignment of the taste of the English nation. Patriotism forced the classicists to oppose his views, as it had forced Catholic and Protestant Englishmen to unite against the invasion threatened by the Spanish Armada. When they took a position favorable to the national poet it was easy to find good arguments to sustain it. In 1767 the Honorable Mrs. Montagu, a *grande dame* with a taste for literature, published an essay, *On the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets*,

with some Remarks on the Misrepresentations of M. de Voltaire. She says : —

I was incited to the undertaking by the great admiration of Shakespeare's genius and still greater indignation at the treatment he had received from a French wit, who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favor of the works of our countrymen in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages, while he speaks of every entire piece as a monstrous and ill-constructed farce.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Montagu excuses Shakespeare on the ground of the unpolished character of his age, which 'the examples of judicious artists and the admonitions of delicate connoisseurs had not taught that only graceful nature and decent customs give proper subjects for imitation.' She attacks the French tragedies of Corneille and Racine as stilted and unnatural, and her chapter on 'The Præternatural Beings' does not hesitate to claim great artistic superiority for the Englishman over Æschylus. Had she read the play of Voltaire, in which he attempts to emulate *Hamlet* and creates the most absurd ghost in literature, she could have retorted on him with cutting effect. Through Mrs. Montagu's 188 pages the waning influence of the classic school of criticism is evident. It does not occur to her that there may be two schools of literature, each admirable, neither to be judged by rules induced from the examples of the other, but both by their success in producing beautiful works of art and by their hold on successive generations of men. Dr. Johnson, according to Boswell, said that there 'was not a word of true criticism in Mrs. Montagu's Shakespearean Essay'; an ungallant judgment, to say the least. According to the same authority, however, he said that 'she diffuses more knowledge than any woman I know, or, indeed, almost any man'; in which, unless Mrs. Montagu's conversation was vastly

superior to her book, he was more polite and less frank than his wont.

In the year 1794, R. W. Richardson, Professor of Humanity at the University of Glasgow, brought out a small book of 187 pages entitled *Philosophical Analysis of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters*. This is the first of a long line of books and essays on the subject, and was reprinted in Boston in 1808; it was the first book of literary criticism printed in America. Since then, Shakespeare's literary characters have been written about more fully than any historical personages, with the possible exceptions of Napoleon Bonaparte and Mary Queen of Scots.

The style of the book imitates Dr. Johnson's sententious utterance, but lacks the wit and pith which give the original his rank among great writers. The opening sentences run : —

Moralists of all ages have recommended poetry as an art no less instructive than amusing ; tending at once to improve the heart, and entertain the fancy. The genuine and original poet, peculiarly favored by nature, and intimately acquainted with the constitution of the human mind, not by a long train of metaphysical deductions, but, as it were, by immediate intuition, displays the workings of every affection, detects the origin of every passion, traces its progress, and delineates its character. Thus he teaches us to know ourselves, inspires us with magnanimous sentiments, animates love of virtue, and confirms our hatred of vice. Moreover, by his striking pictures of the instability of human enjoyments, we moderate the vehemence of our desires, fortify our minds, and are enabled to sustain adversity.

This is the very quintessence of the eighteenth century ; a very characteristic point being the implied assumption that any one can become 'intimately acquainted

with the constitution of the human mind by a long train of metaphysical deductions,' in the face of the evident fact that the long train must start from 'some intimate acquaintance with the human mind' unless some knowledge was revealed *a priori*. Mr. Richardson proceeds to dissect Hamlet by Scotch metaphysics, in which human nature is mapped out in a mechanical scheme and the 'passions' and the 'moral principles' contend to control the will, like hostile forces in a foreign country, one or the other obtaining temporarily exclusive possession and driving the other out. The question with regard to Hamlet has always been, why does he not act as he is requested to do by his father? There is no reason why he should not. As he says, he has 'cause and will and strength and means to do it.' The question is attractive because Hamlet is so interesting and intelligent a man, and he is so evidently a man that it is certain there is a rational explanation of his conduct—rational, that is, as far as human character is rational or the will motive-driven and not fortuitous. Mr. Richardson explains Hamlet's failure to act, in the scene when he refrains from killing his uncle at prayer, by saying that just then he was 'irresolute,'—that is to say, his passion, thirst for revenge, and his moral sense of justice exactly balanced one another. Therefore he did not stab his uncle, nor did he give up the idea of doing so. To give Mr. Richardson's words:—

You ask me why he did not kill the usurper? and I answer because he was at that moment irresolute. This irresolution arose from the inherent principles of his constitution, and is to be accounted natural; it arose from virtuous, or at least from amiable sensibility, and therefore cannot be blamed. His sense of justice or his feelings of tenderness, in a moment when his violent emotions were not excited, overcame his resentment.

The reason Hamlet gives for his failure Mr. Richardson says is not the true one: ‘On many occasions we allege those considerations as the motives for our conduct which are not the true ones.’ We do, indeed, especially when we are ashamed of ourselves, but not often in soliloquy; nor do we ever say, ‘I was precisely balanced in motive, like Buridion’s ass between two equidistant and equally attractive bundles of hay.’ We know perfectly well that the ass could have shut one eye by an effort of will. But we can hardly expect a Scotch metaphysician of the school of Reed, loyal to his wooden and systematic psychology, to solve so intricate a problem as the genesis of motive and the connection between character and action in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The terms of his psychology — the ‘affections,’ the ‘passions,’ the ‘moral principles,’ and the like — are at once too inclusive and too nebulous to discuss the delicate elements of personality, and his style, dealing as it does largely in general terms, does not lend itself to the delineation of individual traits when they are so perplexing and obscure.

He is, however, right as to the substratum of the character of Hamlet, and in this is in advance of many of his successors. He says (page 54): ‘The strongest feature in the mind of Hamlet, as exhibited in the tragedy, is an exquisite sense of moral conduct.’ Again (page 28): ‘He is moved by finer principles, by an exquisite sense of virtue, of moral beauty, and turpitude.’ This is true; for though it may be difficult to reconcile Hamlet’s conduct in some instances, notably his sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death by means of a forged document, with the idea of a passionate devotion to justice, it is evident that violation of the moral law governing the relation of the sexes is profoundly abhorrent to him, and that the knowledge of the guilt of his

mother casts him into an utter agony in which the action of his mind is confused, spasmodic, and contradictory. This refinement is also shown by his disgust with drunken excesses, and it goes far to establish the proposition that in Shakespeare's conception he was a young man, as he is in the original story, and called thirty-one to agree with the personality of the great actor, Burbage. In a man of thirty-one the first bloom of enthusiasm for virtue is worn off by the disillusionment of time, but Hamlet exhibits the feelings of a pure-minded, delicately-nurtured boy, not made cynical by premature worldly experience. The pedantic Edinburgh professor feels the charm of Hamlet's moral character, as thousands of others have done, unconsciously. When he endeavors to give some rational explanation of his actions he fails, as we have seen, most lamentably.

He is struck by the fact that though,—

in the progress of the tragedy he appears irresolute and indecisive — discovers reluctance to perform actions, which, we think, needed no hesitation — proceeds to violent outrage where the occasion does not seem to justify evidence — appears jocular where his situation is most serious and alarming — uses subterfuges not consistent with an ingenuous mind, and expresses sentiments not only immoral but inhuman, yet every reader and every audience have hitherto taken part with Hamlet. They have not only pitied, but esteemed him ; and *the voice of the people, in poetry as well as politics*, deserves some attention.

To admit that the 'voice of the people deserves some attention' is very liberal in an eighteenth-century professor. The problem of Hamlet is well stated. It is the question that puzzles us to-day. Mr. Richardson cannot solve it, nor can the latest commentators solve it to our perfect satisfaction, but it has a permanent attraction because it cannot be completely solved — we cannot

pluck the heart out of his mystery any more than we can from the mystery of life. He takes the ground that Hamlet's insanity is feigned, though his mind is in a 'condition of extreme agitation,' therein agreeing with the best authorities on mental disorders. He says that Hamlet 'practices his artifice' on Ophelia in the un-spoken interview when, 'his doublet all unbraced, his stockings fouled,' he 'came before' her. It seems more likely that Hamlet was much hurt when Ophelia, whom he had idealized, and in a certain sense loved, persistently refused to see him, in obedience to her father's commands. He therefore resolved to see her, and, one glance revealing her timid and shallow soul, gave her up forever. It is certainly absurd to suppose that he went to see her to practice his acting of insanity.

In subsequent chapters Mr. Richardson analyzes the characters of Macbeth, Lear, Richard III, Jaques, Timon, and Imogen on the same principles he applied to Hamlet. He fails to appreciate the power of Lear and Macbeth, and his methodical analysis does not disclose the human nature of any of the dramatic figures. His chapter on Imogen is the first acknowledgment by a critic of the beauty of Shakespeare's women, but he misses a full perception of the high-bred purity and sweet dignity of her nature. Dr. Johnson was also blind to these delicate creations, however, and Schlegel and Coleridge were soon to do them justice.

The last chapter is devoted to the 'Faults of Shakespeare.' These are summarized as, 'inattention to the laws of unity, deviations from geographical and historical truth, rude mixture of tragic and comic scenes, together with the vulgarity and even indecency of language admitted too often into his dialogue.' That the unities were necessary had been pretty well discredited during the discussions induced by the attacks of Vol-

taire on the English poet, and the author admits that 'some departure from the strict rules of unity enacted by ancient critics, and some deviation from the simplicity of Grecian poets, is no loss to the drama,' but adds, 'Shakespeare, however, by having known them, and by having adhered to them in some degree, would have been less irregular and incoherent.' He also considers his historical and geographical mistakes of no great moment, but is shocked by the bad taste of bringing comic scenes into a tragedy and representing people of high social station as vulgar in language. He admits that they sometimes are so in real life, and might possibly be realistically represented in comedy, but 'the solemn in dramatical composition should be kept apart from the ludicrous,' because the mind is pained and distracted by 'pouring in upon us at once or in immediate succession opposite feelings though in themselves agreeable.' Taking a fact for granted and then finding a philosophic explanation for it is not unknown in metaphysics. It never occurs to Mr. Richardson that, if people were pained and distracted by the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* or the porter scene in *Macbeth*, they would stay away from the play. On the contrary, they have always insisted on their representation, as if they enjoyed being 'pained and distracted.' The fault of the dramatist being taken for granted, the critic accounts for it by saying that his theory was, 'follow nature.' 'This is an excellent maxim,' but 'Shakespeare misunderstood it.' According to Dr. Richardson, nature should be followed, not as she is, but as she should be. An artificial nature should be evolved by selection. Taste must be exerted.

If we would describe a cheerful landscape, we will avoid mentioning the gloomy forests or deep morasses which may actually exist in it. In like manner, if we would dispose our

audience to *entertain sentiments of veneration for some respectable personage*, we will throw into the shade those levities which may have place in his character but which lessen his dignity. . . . When a judicious improver covers a bleak heath with enlivening groves, or removes the dreariness of a noisome fen, by changing it into a lovely lake, interspersed with islands, can we accuse him of departing from nature? In like manner, the poet who excludes from tragedy mean persons and vulgar language, because they are dissonant to the general tone of his work, neither violates nature nor trespasses against the great obligation he is under of affording us pleasure.

. . . Though, like Polonius, statesmen and courtiers may, on various occasions, be very wise and very foolish; yet, whatever indulgence may be shown to the courtiers and statesmen of real life, *those of the drama must be of an uniform and consistent conduct*.

All this is an epitome of the eighteenth-century view of art. The representation of life on the historic or the tragic plane must at all hazards be dignified and correct. Selection must be made, not of the characteristic or the intimately true, but of that which accords with a certain ideal of stately social bearing. That dramas constructed on this principle are lifeless and dull does not occur to Mr. Richardson; perhaps they were not tiresome to him, but, as he says, 'the voice of the people deserves some attention,' and he pays it none at all. He seems to respect the rule, 'follow nature,' but evades it by making nature unnatural.

More extension has been given to a review of Mr. Richardson's book than its intrinsic merit demands, because it shows that the superstitious regard for the unities was dying out even in academic circles, and because it is the first attempt to analyze any Shakespearean characters as if they were real human beings, although he turns around and argues that they ought

to be unnatural and unreal. His statement that the basis of Hamlet's character 'is an exquisite sense of virtue' meets the approval of the best modern critics, although he does not understand the confusing complex of contradictory traits which overlay it. But perhaps no one but Shakespeare could read that baffling psychological phenomenon, and very likely he could not do so. A pioneer—for we cannot admit that Dr. Johnson even opened the subject—is entitled to respect, and awakens an interest greater than his accomplishment warrants. Mr. Richardson is a pioneer, though he penetrated a very little way.

#### THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT SHAKESPEARE'S LEARNING

In the eighteenth century there was a disposition in many members of the scholarly and critical world to assert that Shakespeare was a man of learning in the technical sense. The value of a classical education seemed to be in question, for if a man could produce such fine literature without education, of what use was a knowledge of Latin and Greek or even a university degree? It was intolerable to think that a man by natural ability alone could outdo graduates trained to write verse in Latin, the native language of poetry. The apt use the dramatist makes of classical history and mythology, and the ease of his incidental allusions to both, seem to imply the familiarity begotten of intimate acquaintance, and to sustain the natural desire to affiliate him with the academic world. Admitting that he violated the rules as no educated man should, it must be proved for the credit of learning that his 'small Latin and less Greek' was enough to give him considerable acquaintance with Latin writers in the original.

Rowe thought that 'his acquaintance with Latin authors was such as he might have gained at school; he could remember tags of Horace or Virgil, but was unable to read Plautus in the original.' Gildon believed that the poet had read Ovid and Plautus. Dennis, a man of strong sense, denied that he 'had learning and a familiar acquaintance with the Ancients.' Pope is rather cautious in his statements, and thinks that the errors in the Latin of the folio, such as 'Exit omnes,' 'Enter three witches solus,' 'actus tertia,' and the like, are errors of the printers. He asserts that the dramatist 'had much reading'; that he 'was very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity'; that he copied speeches from Plutarch in *Coriolanus*; that he 'appears to have been conversant with Plautus,' and was 'manifestly acquainted with the modern Italian writers of novels.' The many anachronisms in the plays he attributes to the illiteracy of the actors and publishers. He, however, distinguishes between 'learning' and 'languages.' 'How far,' he writes, 'he was ignorant of the latter I cannot determine; but 't is plain he had much reading at least, if they will not call it learning.' Pope's position is mainly right, but his dislike to commit himself and his disposition to argue a point so that he may seem to agree with whichever side is eventually proved right, is apparent in all he says in his preface. He would have saved himself great annoyance had he hedged as carefully in his emendations of the text.

Theobald was at first inclined to believe from similarity of expression that Shakespeare knew the classics at first hand. Upton and Grey were eager to prove that he was a man of profound reading. In 1748 Peter Whaley brought out his *Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare*, and took the ground that he 'knew enough

Latin to have acquired taste and elegance of judgment,' which, presumably, he thinks all good Latin scholars possess. The question was one well adapted to Johnson's critical faculty, because it is to be determined by a common-sense examination of facts, and is not at all a matter of literary art. He points out that—

Jonson, his friend, affirms that he had 'small Latin and less Greek'; who, besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at the time when the character and acquisitions of Shakespeare were known to multitudes. His evidence ought therefore to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force could be opposed. . . . Some have imagined that they have discovered deep learning in many imitations of old writers; but the examples which I have known urged, were drawn from books translated in his time; or even such easy coincidences of thought as will happen to all who consider the same subjects; or such remarks on life or axioms of morality as float in conversation, and are transmitted through the world in proverbial sentences.

Johnson shows that the poet used North's translation of Plutarch and that there was in the sixteenth century an English version of the Latin comedy on which the *Comedy of Errors* is founded. He concludes:—

There is however proof enough that he was a very diligent reader, nor was our language then so indigent of books but that he might very liberally indulge his curiosity without excursion into foreign literature. Many of the Roman authors were translated and some of the Greek. . . . This was a stock of knowledge sufficient for a mind so capable of appropriating and improving it.

In 1767 Dr. Richard Farmer, Master of Emmanuel College and Head Librarian of the University of Cambridge, published a long *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*. In this he shows that the dramatist inva-

riably used translations when he based his plot on a story originally told in a foreign language, because wherever the translator or printer made a mistake he follows in the same error. Aided by Capell, whom he calls 'a very curious and intelligent gentleman,' he points out the absurdity of drawing an argument from parallel passages in the classics unless the parallels are near together. For instance, it is absurd to imagine that the 'sweete oblivious antidote' Macbeth asks for was suggested by the 'Nepenthe' of Ulysses. He illustrates this point very fully, but he had such a strong case that it was not difficult to make a convincing argument. He fails to avail himself of the many openings for caustic wit which Steevens would have improved so gleefully, and so much to our satisfaction.

Dr. Farmer does not treat the subject in a very broad way, for in reality it is related to the essentials of literary creation. But his paper is a document in Shakespearean criticism, though it seems strange to us that the question should have been debated. Shakespeare, we know, came to London a young man, with little scholastic education. Very likely he had construed some of Ovid, and had imbibed the traditional respect for Latin literature felt by his contemporaries. Then for some twenty years he spent his time professionally as actor and playwright and theatrical 'Johannes Factotum.' Probably he had to appear in a new part every week. Even admitting that the season was interrupted, it is evidently out of the question that he could have spent much time in reading anything which was not useful in his vocation, certainly not in translating Latin books, because such a task would not have been of the slightest benefit to him. Ben Jonson could do it, but he was not a theatrical owner like Shakespeare. But Shakespeare saw plays continually, and was thrown into

intimate relations with poets and writers ; he was in the centre of the literary as well as of the theatrical world. As Dr. Farmer quotes,—probably from Capell,—‘They who are in such astonishment at the learning of Shakespeare forget that the Pagan imagery was familiar to all the poets of his time, and that abundance of this sort of learning was to be picked up from almost every English book that he could take in his hands.’ Under similar conditions we know that a bright young man of to-day assimilates literary expressions and the prevalent literary tone with great rapidity. It is not at all remarkable that the young Shakespeare should have used classical allusions and some Latin words in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The marvel is how he so soon got enough knowledge of good society and of dilettante culture to portray a representative group of a class he could never have seen in Stratford. Anybody can write rhymes, and some people can even read Latin now, but who can embody the modern Biron, even if he has known a modern illustration of that delightful compound of whim, gallantry, and intelligence?

The question of Shakespeare’s learning is at best a fanciful one, like Shakespeare’s knowledge of the law or medicine or the Bible. It sets on one side all consideration of the artistic receptive and creative power, and even of the exceptionally active intellect — it leaves Shakespeare out. So do some other branches of Shakespearean criticism.

#### MAURICE MORGANN

Mrs. Montagu expressed the general opinion of the time that Sir John Falstaff was a coward. The Gads-hill exploit she calls ‘a frolic to play on the cowardly and braggart temper of Falstaffe.’ In 1777 appeared Maurice Morgann’s *Essay on the Dramatic Character*

of *Sir John Falstaffe*. Of this admirable discussion the author says, ‘The vindication of Falstaffe’s courage is truly no otherwise the object than some fantastic oak or grotesque rock may be the object of a morning ride ; yet, being purposed as such, may serve to limit the distance and shape the course. The real object is exercise, and the delight which a rich, beautiful, and picturesque, and perhaps unknown, country may excite from every side.’ Accordingly, though his thesis is, ‘ Falstaffe is not a coward,’ he diverges from his line of proof to general criticism of the Shakespearean art. Richardson had discussed some of the personages of the plays, but it is principally as stage figures that he apprehends them. He regards what they say and do, and not why they talk and act in a certain manner. This is the way in which most people regard their fellow mortals,—they do not trouble themselves much about the finer motives of their neighbors ; but it was not Shakespeare’s way, though it was the way of the eighteenth-century critics. Mr. Morgann’s attitude to the question is modern. The contrast between his style and method and that of Dr. Johnson’s preface is so striking as to suggest that they must be a century apart instead of only fifteen years.

Mr. Morgann says that Shakespeare —

very frequently makes a character act and speak from those parts of the composition (of his nature) which are *inferred only and not distinctly shown*. This produces a wonderful effect ; it seems to carry us beyond the poet to nature itself and gives an integrity and truth to facts and character which they could not otherwise obtain. And this is in reality that art in Shakespeare, which being withdrawn from our notice we more emphatically call *nature*. A felt propriety

<sup>1</sup> He refers of course to the Falstaff of *Henry IV*, disregarding the water-color replica of *Merry Wives*.

and truth from causes unseen I take to be the highest point of poetic composition. If the characters of Shakespeare are thus whole, and, as it were, original, while those of almost all other writers are mere imitation, it may be fit to consider them rather as historic than as dramatic beings, and when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the whole of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

This shows more insight into human nature than any other critic of the century possessed, and a critical faculty absolutely necessary to an adequate comprehension of the Elizabethan tragedies. The stage character acts from some evident motive, the villain scowls, the lover sighs professionally ; but a man is a complex, and the motive which determines actions is not paraded as the reason for conduct.

The critic applies this principle to Falstaff and says that he is not radically timid, because ‘cowardice is not the impression which the whole character of Falstaffe is calculated to make on the minds of an audience,’ and that we estimate character by actions, but interpret actions by a feeling for the character made on us by minute circumstances. Sir John lies and boasts fearfully, but we feel that what in another would proceed from cowardice or egotism, in him is prompted by jocularity and humorous exaggeration. He is absolutely indifferent to the punctilio or artificial point of honor, because he is intelligent but destitute of the higher imagination. He is of this earth, and judges everything by a mundane standard, but is by no means a ‘constitutional coward.’ This we ‘feel from the totality of the presentation.’ That we are right is proved by the social position of the man as an old soldier in enjoyment of a pension, and one to whom a charge of foot is intrusted. Mr. Morgann develops

these points with insight, and throughout regards Sir John as a real man and points out that he 'never does or says anything which indicates terror or disorder of mind.' He is always self-possessed, but we cannot conceive of him as doing anything heroic.

That Falstaff is not constitutionally timid is evident from the ascendancy he possesses over his disreputable followers. No one acquires this power over a set of parasites unless the men know instinctively that their 'boss' will not shrink from physical conflict if they rebel. Falstaff has not the slightest regard for them, but they obey him. This is the lowest form of courage, but no one can be a leader of rough men without it. This Falstaff possesses. Of the higher form which leads a man to sacrifice himself for a principle or for others,—a courage based on unselfishness, which is sometimes strong enough to conquer physical timidity,—he is entirely destitute. To him honor is something absurd. There is no profit in it. 'Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. . . . Honor is a mere scutcheon.' This is the view of the unimaginative man, and Falstaff never betrays the least imaginative faculty in his language, so consistent is the dramatist to his conception of a character.

Mr. Morgann points out the fact that Falstaff is the same in both parts of the play, and says this is the only instance where a personage is presented in two plays with perfect consistency. He passes from the particular to more general considerations of Shakespeare's method, always with the same insight and justness of touch. The remembrance that Voltaire had called the great dramatist a barbarian inspires the following eloquent passage :—

When the hand of time shall have brushed off his present Editors and Commentators, and when the very name of Vol-

taire, and even the memory of the language in which he has written, shall be no more, the Appalachian Mountains, the banks of the Ohio, and the plains of Sciota shall resound with the accents of this Barbarian. In his native tongue he shall roll the genuine passions of nature, nor shall the griefs of Lear be alleviated, nor the charms and wit of Rosalind be abated by time. There is, indeed, nothing perishable about him, except that very learning which he is said so much to want. He had not, it is true, enough for the demands of the age in which he lived, but he had perhaps too much for the reach of his genius, and the interest of his fame. Milton and he will carry the decayed remnants and fripperies of antient mythology into more distant ages than they are by their own force entitled to extend ; and the metamorphoses of Ovid, upheld by them, lay in a new claim to unmerited immortality.

Nor is his eulogy of Shakespeare in a lower strain :—

He differs essentially from all other writers. Him we may profess rather to feel than to understand, and it is safer to say, on many occasions, that we are possessed by him than that we possess him. And no wonder, — he scatters the seeds of things, the principles of character and action, with so cunning a hand, yet with so careless an air, and, master of our feelings, submits himself so little to our judgment, that everything seems superior. We discern not his course, we see no connection of cause and effect, we are rapt in ignorant admiration and claim no kindred with his abilities. All the incidents, all the parts, look like chance, whilst we feel and are sensible that the whole is design. His characters not only act and speak in strict conformity to nature, but in strict relation to us ; just so much is shown as is requisite, just so much is impressed ; he commands every passage to our heads and to our hearts, and moulds us as he pleases, and that with so much ease, that he never betrays his own exertions. We see these characters act from the mingled motives of passion, reason, interest, habit, and complexion in all their proportions when they are supposed to know it not themselves, and we are made to acknowledge that their actions and sentiments are, from these

motives, the natural result. He at once blends and distinguishes everything. Everything is complicated, everything is plain. I restrain the further expressions of my admiration lest they should seem not applicable to man ; but it is really astonishing that a mere human being, a part of humanity only, should so perfectly comprehend the whole, and that he should possess such exquisite art, that whilst every woman and every child shall feel the whole effect, his learned editors and commentators should yet so very frequently mistake or seem ignorant of the cause. A sceptre or a straw are in his hands of equal efficacy ; he needs no selection ; he converts everything into excellence ; nothing is too great, nothing is too base. Is a character efficient like Richard III, it is everything we can wish : is it otherwise like Hamlet, it is productive of equal admiration. Action produces one mode of excellence and inaction another. The chronicle, the novel, or the ballad ; the king, or the beggar, the hero, the madman, the sot, or the fool ; it is all one ; nothing is worse, nothing is better. The same genius pervades and is equally admirable in all. Or is a character to be shown in progressive change and the events of years comprised within the hour ; with what a magic hand does he prepare and scatter his spells ! The understanding must in the first place be subdued, and, lo ! how the rooted prejudices of the child spring up to confound the man ! The weird sisters rise, and order is extinguished. The laws of nature give way and leave nothing in our minds but wildness and horror. No pause is allowed us for reflection. Horrid sentiment, furious guilt and compunction, air-drawn daggers, murders, ghosts and enchantment, shake and ‘ possess us wholly.’ In the meantime the process is completed. Macbeth changes under our eye, ‘ the milk of human kindness is converted to gall ’ ; ‘ he has supped full of horrors,’ and his ‘ way of life is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf ’ ; whilst we, the fools of nature, are insensible to the shifting of place and the lapse of time, and, till the curtain drops, never once awake to the truth of things, or recognize the laws of existence. On such an occasion a fellow like Rymer, waking from his trance, shall lift up his constable’s staff, and charge this

great magician, this daring practicer of arts inhibited, in the name of Aristotle to surrender; whilst Aristotle himself, disowning his wretched officer, would fall prostrate at his feet and acknowledge his supremacy. ‘O supreme of dramatic excellence!’ (might he say) ‘not to me be imputed the insolence of fools. The bards of Greece were confined within the narrow circle of the chorus, and hence they found themselves constrained to practice, for the most part the precision, and copy the details of nature. I followed them, and knew not that a larger circle might be drawn, and the drama extended to the whole reach of human genius. Convinced, I see that a more compendious nature may be obtained; a nature of effects only, to which neither the relations of place, or continuity of time are always essential. Nature condescending to the faculties and apprehensions of man, has drawn through human life a regular chain of visible cause and effects. But poetry delights in surprise, conceals her steps, seizes at once upon the heart, and obtains the sublime of things without betraying the rounds of her ascent? True Poesy is magic, not nature, an effect from causes hidden or unknown. To the magician I prescribed no laws; his law and his power are one; his power is his law. Him who neither imitates nor is within the reach of imitation, no precedents can or ought to bind, no limits to contain. If this end is obtained, who shall question his course? Means, whether apparent or hidden, are justified in Poesy by success; but then most perfect and most admirable when most concealed! ’

Mr. Morgann is not mentioned in the encyclopædias, but his prose is the most living and vigorous of the eighteenth century—if we except Burke’s. Some extension is given to the extract because his book is not easy to come at, and it shows that poetry is to be estimated by the effect it produces and not by resemblance to previous models or adherence to rules. That ‘Poesy is magic,’ that ‘means are justified by success and the artist is his own law,’ is going as far as Keats would

have gone in an appreciation of beauty in words. The book must have appeared very heretical to Dr. Johnson and his friends, — indeed to the entire scholastic world of the day, to which moderation and restraint were cardinal literary virtues ; to us it seems a just appreciation of Sir John and of the luxuriance of the great poet's genius, though it overlooks the fact that over-luxuriance is a fault, more divine perhaps, but hardly less displeasing, than slavish moderation or studied unity.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1834)

THE progress of Shakespearean criticism in the eighteenth century is manifest. Most of the work was textual or historic, and, though it was complete in neither direction, the difference between Rowe and Malone is far greater than the difference between Malone and the Cambridge editors. In æsthetic and literary interpretation no solid advance was made, unless we allow to Morgann's isolated paper more significance than its restricted topic can claim. Unreasoning love and admiration of the plays, always strong among educated men, became so imperious in its expression that no dullard like Rymer—dull that is in artistic sense, not in intellectual ability—dare write anything derogatory to them for fear of the storm of contemptuous public opinion he was sure to encounter. Reverence for the unities, once a general academic superstition, as we have noticed, grew weaker with each succeeding decade. By degrees, too, it began to be felt that the characters were the result of creative power putting together the elements of human nature in a new combination, and not merely of skill in writing stage dialogue full of witty, eloquent, and pathetic speeches. Judging from Morgann's words with reference to Rosalind and Mr. Richardson's inadequate analysis of Imogen, it began to dawn on critics that Shakespeare's women, though originally represented by boys, were on the same artistic plane as his men, equally various, equally true, and some of them striking as deep a root into human nature.

With the opening of the nineteenth century, if we take Coleridge as a representative,—and his critical faculty and his wide influence certainly entitle him to be so considered,—Shakespearean criticism made a decided advance. Not that academic circles suddenly ceased to be Johnsonian and classic and became Coleridgean and romantic, or that the *Edinburgh Review* became liberal, but that energetic and talented young men broke away from literary tradition and rallied around a new standard. In fact, the old had become too conventional. One enthusiastic young man said that Pope was not a poet. Other enthusiastic young men agreed with him. Wordsworth even dared to say that the great Dr. Johnson's style was a 'hubbub of words.' Verse was written in new free and varied forms, the lyrical element predominating. It was received at first with ridicule, but the best of it slowly made its way to popular favor. Coleridge lectured on Shakespeare, and a great many people listened with approval. The manifestations of the new spirit in literature were manifold. The movement is known as the rise of romanticism. It extended over Europe, and its influence on literature is fully treated in Brandeis's *The Rise of the Romantic Movement in Europe*.

This is not the place to detail the causes of the romantic movement. Advanced Englishmen were at first much excited over the French Revolution. They hailed it as an emancipation. Afterwards they were alarmed by the days of the Terror, and still more by the rise of Napoleon. From the literary point of view, the inoculation of a few Englishmen with the metaphysics of Kant and the German criticism of the drama was the most efficient. Literature, from the ballad to the drama, was regarded as a manifestation of the human spirit, not as a thing apart, a collection of scholastic or anti-

quarian documents. German thought gave enthusiastic young men new conceptions as to the nature of the beautiful and the function of the artist. Even when these conceptions were imperfectly apprehended, they were germinal, and were taken up by minds already full of kindred notions.

This change of the critical point of view did not come suddenly over England. Throughout the eighteenth century there had been an undercurrent of romanticism.<sup>1</sup> Gray, though an academic scholar, was a romantic poet. Kindly humanitarianism pervades the poetry and prose of Goldsmith and Cowper. There are always conservatives and romantics. Keats wrote with fine scorn of the old classical school, in the free verse form the later romanticists affected: —

Yes, a schism,  
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,  
Made great Apollo blush for this his land.  
Men were thought wise who could not understand  
His glories : with a puling infant's force  
They swayed about upon a rocking horse  
And thought it Pegasus. But ye were dead  
To things ye know not of —were closely wed  
To musty laws, lined out with wretched rule  
And compass vile ! so that ye taught a school  
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,  
Till like the certain wands of Jacob's wit  
Their verses tallied. Easy was the task :  
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask  
Of Poesy.

But at the very time this was written the critical Reviews were in the hands of the conservatives. On the other hand we read of Coleridge's father saying as

<sup>1</sup> This is well traced out by Professor Phelps in the *Romantic Movement of the Eighteenth Century*.

early as 1775, when Dr. Johnson was a recognized authority in criticism, that 'he detested' the measured, insipid, rhetorical pseudo-classical correctness of the school of Pope.' In the year his son was born (1772) he wrote in a Latin grammar he published, 'Artificial rules hamper a great genius: A soaring mind will wear no shackles,' a sentence singularly inappropriate in a grammar, but embodying one of the most extreme tenets of romanticism.

But we speak of the Elizabethan drama also as the 'romantic drama,' and properly, for in its general conception of the mystery of life and the power of the human will, as well as its occasional violence and exaggeration, it is characterized by the method and the faults of romanticism. The Renaissance was, too, a lyrical age, and the Elizabethan lyric is the natural expression of the romantic spirit. But the word applied to the early seventeenth century has a slightly different significance when we use it of the later period. The first was more healthily objective, it revered the newly discovered world of antiquity. The latter was self-conscious, and its subjectivity easily degenerated into sentimentalism, an artificial cultivation of personal emotions. It revered mediævalism, so much so, that on the Continent many of its enthusiasts became Catholics. It loved the mysterious and the obscure. The metaphysical base of the thought of the two was quite different; between them lay the age of Puritanism, which left an ineffaceable mark on the English mind. The Coleridgean romanticist was face to face with democracy, whether he knew it or not. The Shakespearean romanticism was aristocratic and feudal. But in both periods there was a coming to the surface of the Gothic spirit, as opposed to the Greco-Latin spirit. The Goth delights in sombreness, — half-lights and mystery, —

and puts together in his story and his cathedral elements that seem incongruous,—angels and demons, the ideal and the coarse, commonplace, jesting spirits of the earth. In his literature he rebels against the restraint, the self-possession, the dignity and finish of classic art. Sometimes this resulted in a strong and natural picture of the world ; sometimes, as in *Titus Andronicus* and the *Duchess of Malfi*, it overdid itself in violent action. So there was enough resemblance and inner sympathy between 1608 and 1808 to make the author of the *Ancient Mariner* the best interpreter of *The Tempest* and *Hamlet* that had appeared, and indeed one of the best that has ever appeared, and the first critic on whose æsthetic conceptions later critics could build. The new romanticism was akin to the old, and could sympathize more fully with its poetic spirit. It took a larger view of the artist, a more enthusiastic view of the world and man. It set aside the classical tradition firmly, and ranked Shakespeare at once with the old masters. Its unreasoning admiration of the plays was not less, but its reasoned admiration was more philosophical and its analysis more profound. Even when the analysis is fanciful or tinged by German mysticism, it is at least an attempt to get at the nature of the thing. Of all these tendencies Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the exponent. Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, and the others are at once his spiritual pupils and the children of their age.

Coleridge's influence was largely due to his remarkable powers of conversation. To the quickening influence of his talk, testimony is abundant. The printed record of his criticism<sup>1</sup> on Shakespeare is fragmentary

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism has been brought together and arranged as well as possible by Mr. Ashe, in one

though of considerable bulk. It consists of extracts from *The Friend* and *Biographia Literaria*, newspaper reports of his lectures, notes taken by some one of the audience, and a mass of matter from his notes published after his death by his nephew, H. N. Coleridge, under the title of *Literary Remains*. This consists of some papers of considerable length and many notes, some of which are careless jottings of ideas, others elaborated matter to be used in his lectures. In all this there are naturally many repetitions to be found, and few lines of thought are logically followed out. Coleridge was well called the 'man of magnificent beginnings,' of 'infinite title pages.' His *Table Talk*, published after his death, contains many striking and just remarks on Shakespeare. He read continuously, and made full notes for his lectures, but usually abandoned his written material, sometimes disappointing and wearying his audience by his digressions, but oftener holding it in rapt attention, so much so that Mr. Collier, the Shakespearean editor, who as a young man attended his lectures and took shorthand notes, says:—

They [the reports, afterwards printed] are, I am sure, full of omissions, owing in some degree to want of facility on my part, in a greater degree, perhaps, to a mistaken estimate of what it was, or was not, expedient to minute, and in no little proportion to the fact that in some cases I relied upon my recollection to fill up chasms in my memoranda. A few defects may be attributed to my position among the auditors (though

volume (pp. 540), Bohn's Library. Mr. Ashe omits, however, the article in the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* on 'The Method of Shakespeare,' little more than two pages of which were extracted from *The Friend*. The article is also interesting as showing that Coleridge was not above copying from himself, whether this or the paper in *The Friend* were published first.

the lectures were not always very fully attended), and others to the plain fact that I was not infrequently so engrossed and absorbed by the almost inspired look and manner of the speaker, that I was for a time incapable of performing the mechanical duty of writing.

Although the eighteenth-century critics had the advantage of seeing Shakespeare's women played by some great actresses — notably, Sarah Siddons — they were strangely insensible to them except as stage figures. They classed Juliet and Ophelia together as girls in love, and regarded Lady Macbeth as a type of the ambitious, masterful woman. The delicate shading that distinguishes Rosalind and Viola was too fine for their perception. Coleridge, however, claims for them as a class the simplicity, tenderness, and latent heroism that mark gracious womanhood. Beaumont and Fletcher's women, he says, 'are, when of the right kind, not decent, when heroic, complete viragos.'

But in Shakespeare all the elements of womanhood are holy, and there is the sweet yet dignified feeling of *all that continuates society*,<sup>1</sup> as sense of ancestry and of sex, with a purity unassailable by sophistry, because it rests not in the analytical processes, but in that same equipoise of the faculties, during which the feelings are representative of all past experience, not of the individual only, but of all those by whom she has been educated and their predecessors even up to the first woman that lived. Shakespeare saw that the want of prominence, which Pope notices for sarcasm, was the blessed beauty of woman's character, and knew that it arose not from any deficiency, but from the more exquisite harmony of all the parts of the moral being constituting one living total of head and heart. He has drawn it, indeed, in all its distinctive energies of faith, patience, constancy, fortitude, —

<sup>1</sup> Here Coleridge seems to anticipate by the intuition of genius the modern theory of atavism and race heredity.

shown in all of them as following the heart, which gives its results by a nice tact and intuition, without the intervention of the discursive faculty,— sees all things in and by the light of the affections, and errs, if it ever err, in the exaggerations of love alone. In all the Shakespearean women there is essentially the same foundation and principle; the distinct individuality and variety are merely the result of the modification of circumstances, whether in Miranda the maiden, in Imogen the wife, or in Katharine the queen.

We can agree heartily that the ‘foundation and principle’ is the same, but dissent no less heartily from the critic’s assertion that the individuality is the result of the modification of circumstances; for Viola, Portia, and Miranda are far more distinctly and radically different individuals than are the men in the plays, if we exclude the Jew and the Magician. Coleridge’s enthusiasm for the Shakespearean women causes him to overestimate Ophelia. Of her he says:—

. . . the faults of the sex from which Ophelia is so free, that the mere freedom therefrom constitutes her character. Note Shakespeare’s charm of composing the female character by the absence of characters, that is, marks and out-juttings. . . . The soliloquy of Ophelia which follows is the perfection of love — so exquisitely unselfish.

To us it seems as if that soliloquy, so musical in its rhythm, is a marvelous revelation of a shallow nature; and shallowness connotes selfishness, the absence of capacity for the profounder psychical relations.

O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown.

She, like her father, is convinced that Hamlet’s mind is unsettled, because he talks in an excited and unconventional manner. She then thinks of his position and appearance, and then of herself, all in placidly modulated language. She is a docile and negative

character, incapable of the sympathetic insight and of the passion to help and comfort which is the attribute of feminine love. The loneliness of soul which her deficiencies force on her lover is one of his troubles.

Coleridge says that ‘Shakespeare has left the character of the Queen in an unpleasant perplexity. Was she or was she not conscious of the fratricide?’

The queen is an indolent, good-natured, sensual creature, but her evident astonishment when Hamlet says:—

A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,  
As kill a king, and marry with his brother,—

coupled with the fact that he at once drops the accusation, should acquit her of being *particeps criminis*.

Coleridge’s remarks on the characters are full of genuine human sympathy. They are his brothers and sisters in circumstances that elicit pity and love. Iago affects him with terror, as if he were alive. This is entirely different from the cool regard of the classic critics. The romanticist yields to his emotions,—sometimes, indeed, cherishes and exaggerates them.

His estimate of Hamlet is much the same as that of his contemporary, Schlegel, and both may be traced to the criticism of Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*. This view is that Hamlet lacked will power to carry out a resolution. In the lectures of 1811–12 Coleridge says:—

He [Shakespeare] intended to portray a person in whose view the external world and all its incidents and objects were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet believed external things in the same way that a man of vivid imagination, who shuts his eyes, sees what has previously made an impression on his organs.

The same general philosophical view obtains in the lectures of 1818:—

In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our mind. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed: his thoughts and the images of his fancy are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations acquire, as they pass, a form and color not their own. Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment.

In 1812 Coleridge said:—

He [Hamlet] is full of purpose but void of that quality of mind which accomplishes purpose. Anything finer than this conception, and working out of a great character, is merely impossible. Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth, that action is the chief end of existence — that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from, or render us repugnant to action, and lead us to think of doing until the time has elapsed when we can do anything effectually. Hamlet is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive, human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.

This, at least, is better than Mr. Richardson's explanation that he does not act because he is 'irresolute.' It is an attempt to explain irresolution by mental and temperamental composition. It is more philosophical than the explanation that Hamlet dreaded to shed blood or that he feared the consequences of his act, of which

there is not the slightest evidence in the play. With some modifications it is the position taken by the leading critics of the nineteenth century.

He gives the final blow to the idea that the unities of time and place are vital in the construction of a drama. In his second lecture of the 1811-12 series he said:—

The works of Shakespeare are honored in a double way, by the admiration of the Germans and the contempt of the French. . . . Among other points of objection taken by the French, perhaps the most noticeable is that he has not observed the sacred unities, so hallowed by the practice of their own extolled tragedians. They hold, of course, after Corneille and Racine, that Sophocles is the most perfect model for tragedy, and Aristotle its most infallible censor; and that, as *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and other dramas by Shakespeare are not framed upon that model, and consequently not subject to the same laws, they maintain that Shakespeare was a sort of irregular genius, that he is now and then tasteful and touching, but generally incorrect; and in short that he was a mere child of nature, who did not know any better than to write as he has written.

Coleridge's answer is, that the construction of the ancient theatre and the presence of the chorus necessitated continuity of action, but that even then the plays represented 'were made to include within a short space of time events which it is impossible should have occurred in that short space.' In both cases dramatic performances were looked on as ideal. 'Nobody supposes that a tragedian suffers real pain when he is stabbed or tortured.' And so real occurrences, when imitated, must be transposed, foreshortened, and forced into a temporal perspective in order to create an artistic illusion. The length of a drama is limited to two hours or so by the power of an audience for enduring emotional excitement. The time supposed to elapse is

limited or extended by an artificial convention to include all that is essential to the plot.

Coleridge justifies the juxtaposition of the comic and tragic in the old plays by the obvious argument of the effect of contrast. He rejects for no sufficient reason the porter scene in *Macbeth*. He considers the fools the legitimate successors of the 'vice' of the moralities, and says they are not used only to create amusement; he thinks they fill to a certain extent the function of the Greek chorus, in that they stand outside of the action and comment on what is going on as a spectator might. In some of the plays he thinks that the office of the fool is divided among several characters. He discusses the probable order in which the plays were written, and, characteristically, does not base himself on the evidence collected by Malone, but on psychological reasons, and divides them into 'youthful,' 'manly,' and 'mature' plays.

He notices the important point that 'the works of Shakespeare are romantic poetry revealing itself in the drama,' and says, following Schlegel, that —

they are in the ancient sense neither tragedies nor comedies nor both in one, but a different genus, diverse in kind, not merely different in degree. They may be called romantic dramas or dramatic romances. . . . The essence of the Athenian dramatists consists of the sternest separation of the diverse in kind and the disparate in degree, whilst the romantic drama delights in interlacing by a rainbow-like transfusion of hues the one with the other.

But one is not of a higher degree of beauty than another, for —

we call, for we both see and feel, the swan and the dove transcendently beautiful. As absurd would it be to institute a comparison between their separate claims to beauty from any

abstract rule common to both, without reference to the life and being of the animals themselves—or as if, having first seen the dove, we abstracted its outlines, gave them a false generalization, called them the principles or ideal of bird-beauty and then proceeded to criticize the swan or the eagle:—not less absurd is it to pass judgment on the works of a poet on the mere ground that they have been called by the same class-name with the works of other poets in other times and circumstances, or on any ground, indeed, save that of their inappropriateness of their own end and being, their want of significance as symbols or physiognomy.

In this Coleridge recognizes the principle that the human race ‘works for itself new organs of power appropriate to a new sphere of its activity,’ and shakes himself free from the narrow notion of restricted forms, each with its specially imposed rules. It is a great advance to claim unhesitatingly for the Gothic art of Shakespeare the right to be judged by itself with reference to its ‘own end and being,’ and not by formal comparison with the Greek art of Sophocles.

The most consecutive piece of criticism is headed, in *Literary Remains*, ‘Recapitulation and Summary of the Characteristics of Shakespeare’s Dramas.’ It occupies ten pages, and Mr. H. N. Coleridge, the editor, says it was ‘for the most part communicated by Mr. Justice Coleridge’ (Sir John Taylor Coleridge). Mr. Ashe adds, ‘That is to say, written by Mr. Justice Coleridge and revised by H. N. Coleridge.’ But it bears many marks of the mind of S. T. Coleridge, in fact, seems his in everything but its logical order. It contains two of the passages which have been made the basis of charging him with plagiarizing from Augustus Schlegel (of which more hereafter). Mr. Justice Coleridge would not have taken matter from a German book and called it a transcription of his uncle’s notes. Nor could he have written

such excellent Shakespearean criticism unless the spirit of S. T. Coleridge had been speaking through him. Take the sentence, ‘The stage in Shakespeare’s time was a naked room with a blanket for a curtain, but he made it a field for monarchs.’ That is precisely like the great Coleridge in its formal inaccuracy and its radical truth. The stage in Shakespeare’s time was not a room, it was a platform open on three sides. There was no curtain unless before the recess under the balcony which ran across the rear. But Shakespeare did make it a ‘field for monarchs’; he peopled it with dignified and noble figures, monarchs in intellect and will. There is as much of Coleridge in this short essay as in any other part of the book, and it is always taken as his. He says :—

It seems to me that his plays are distinguished from those of all other dramatic poets by the following characteristics :—

1. Expectation in preference to surprise. As the feeling with which we startle at a shooting star, compared with that of watching the sunrise at the preëstablished moment, such and so low is surprise compared with expectation.
2. Signal adherence to the great law of nature that all opposites tend to attract and temper each other. Passion in Shakespeare generally displays libertinism, but involves morality. . . . Hence, real folly and dullness are made by him the vehicles of wisdom.

3. Keeping at all times in the high road of life. Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice. Shakespeare’s fathers are roused by ingratitude ; his husbands stung by unfaithfulness ; in him, in short, the affections are wounded in those points in which all may, nay, must, feel. . . . He does not use the faulty thing for a faulty purpose, nor carry on war against virtue by causing wickedness to appear as no wickedness, through the medium of a morbid sympathy with the unfortunate. He inverts not the order of nature and propriety,— does not make every

magistrate a drunkard or glutton, nor every poor man meek, humane, and temperate.

4. Independence of the dramatic interest in the plot. The interest in the plot is always in fact on account of the characters, not *vice versa* as in almost all other writers; the plot is a mere canvas and no more.

5. Independence of the interest in the story as the ground-work of the plot. Hence Shakespeare never took the trouble of inventing stories. . . . The greater part, if not all of his dramas, were as far as the names and main incidents are concerned already stock-plays. All the stories pre-existed in the chronicles, ballads, or translations of contemporary writers.

#### 6. Interfusion of the lyrical.

7. The characters of the *dramatis personæ*, like those in real life, *are to be inferred by the reader* — they are not told to him. Shakespeare's characters, like those in real life, are very commonly misunderstood. The causes are the same in either case. If you take only what the friends of the character say you may be deceived, and still more so, if that which his enemies say; nay, even the character himself sees himself through the medium of his character, and not exactly as he is. Take all together, not omitting a shrewd hint from the clown or the fool, and perhaps your impression will be right and you may know whether you have in fact discovered the poet's own idea, all the speeches receiving light from it and attesting its reality by reflecting it.

Lastly, in Shakespeare the heterogeneous is limited, as it is in nature. You must not suppose a pressure or passion always acting on or in the character. He followed the main march of the human affections. He entered into no analysis of the passions or faiths of men, but assured himself that such and such passions and faiths were grounded in our common nature and not in the mere accidents of ignorance or disease.

When Coleridge keeps clear of German metaphysics his criticism is of the above clear and sound nature, with here and there sentences that light up the matter

and clear away the confusion of the past. Occasionally some reminiscence of Schelling's 'identity in contrariety' comes over him and he attempts to tell the time of day by the light of the moon, but for the most part he reckons from the fixed stars. He notes the tone of each play, how different *Hamlet* is from *Othello*, or *Midsummer Night's Dream* from *The Tempest*. Commenting on *Macbeth*, he makes the excellent point — suggested perhaps by his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* — that 'victorious generals are prone to superstition.' He scouts the idea that *Othello* was a negro, — in this going directly contrary to Schlegel, — and he notices the excellence of Shakespeare's introductions, though he overlooks the fact that the fifth acts are not always so well constructed. Even in their chaotic condition his notes have the unity, or, rather, similarity, which a thinker, even when most desultory, impresses on his utterances, and his reputation as a critic depends as much on his Shakespearean notes as on the discussion of poetry published during his life in *Biographica Literaria*. His lecture on Johnson's Preface is unfortunately lost, but it is not needed to mark the gap between him and his successors and the neoclassicists of the eighteenth century.

During his life it was said that he drew his metaphysical ideas from Schelling and his Shakespearean ideas from Augustus Schlegel, one of the leaders of the German romanticists. After his death the charge was rudely pressed by Sir William Hamilton in the *Edinburgh Review*. His ideas on metaphysics need not detain us, though we may note that Schelling regarded him as a brilliant disciple. With regard to his critical principles it is true that Coleridge did spend a year in Germany in 1798, and much of it at the University of Göttingen, and undoubtedly discussed litera-

ture and art with many of the enthusiastic young men of the new school. He imbibed and expanded the ideas that were in the air, as every young man does according to his receptivity and originality. If these principles are reiterated in later writings, it is absurd to call such reiteration plagiarism, or even an indication of a lack of originality; no one can plagiarize the spirit of his age in religion or philosophy. He adopts certain explanations and ways of accounting for things, and his originality depends on the form in which he embodies and applies them. Plagiarism is repeating the thoughts of another in the original form. Of this Coleridge was never guilty, for he colored and amplified in expression any ideas that came to him from others. There is a minor form of plagiarism, appropriating an image, a turn of phrase, or the general color of a passage. It is usually unconscious, and is pardonable when the original is in a different language. Of this, due largely to a very untrustworthy memory for facts and a very retentive memory for ideas, Coleridge is guilty.

Coleridge undoubtedly lectured on Shakespeare before 1811–12, but we have no record of what he said before the later date. In the ninth lecture of his 1811–12 course, probably early in 1812, he is reported as saying:

Yesterday afternoon a friend left a book for me by a German critic of which I have only had time to read a small part, but what I did read, I approved, and I should be disposed to applaud the work much more highly, were it not that in so doing I should, in a manner, applaud myself. The sentences and opinions are coincident with those to which I gave utterance in my lectures at the Royal Institution.

The friend was Henry Crabb Robinson—and the book was Schlegel's *Dramatic Literature* in German, just published, though read as lectures at Vienna in 1808, and much expanded as printed. This fixes the

date at which Coleridge read Schlegel's book, and also the fact that he had delivered one course and part of another before he read it.

Coleridge died in 1829, and in the preface to *Literary Remains* (1836) Mr. H. N. Coleridge says:—

The materials were fragmentary in the extreme — Sibylline leaves — notes of the lecturer, memoranda of the investigator, outpourings of the solitary and self-communing student. The fear of the press was not in them.

The first thing that occurs to us is that Coleridge is not responsible for anything printed after his death from such a heterogeneous mass of material. It is true that he said: —

I have already written materials [for a work on Shakespeare and the Dramatists] requiring *only to be put together* from the loose papers and commonplace or memorandum books and needing no other change whether of omission, addition, or correction than the mere act of arranging. . . . This work with every art of compression, amounts to three volumes of about five hundred pages each.

By this he would seem to claim all the notes as his, but, as Mr. Ashe says, ‘the opening sentence is probably a marvel of self-deception.’ As H. N. Coleridge says, ‘The materials were fragmentary in the extreme, and to give them method and continuity was a delicate and perplexing task,’ — in which he failed.

Three of the passages in *Literary Remains* which are plainly taken from notes Coleridge translated from Schlegel's *Dramatic Literature*, with the corresponding passages from Schlegel, are as follows: —

In Juliet love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of the spring, but it ends with a long deep sigh like the last breeze of the Italian evening.

This unity of feeling and character pervades every drama of Shakespeare.—COLERIDGE, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, Bohn Edition, p. 237.

All that is most intoxicating in the odor of a southern spring—all that is languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous in the first opening of the rose, all alike breathe forth from this poem. . . . The fullness of life and self-annihilation are here all brought close to each other; and yet these contrasts are so blended into a unity of impression, that the echo which the whole leaves behind in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh.—SCHLEGEL, *Dramatic Literature*, p. 400.

No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, nor indeed is there any danger of this. . . . The form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material; as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes, as it develops itself, from within, and the fulness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Nature, the prime genial artist inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms.—COLERIDGE, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, p. 229.

The works of genius cannot therefore be permitted to be without form, but of this there is no danger. . . . Form is mechanical when, through external force, it is imparted to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality; as, for example, when we give a particular shape to a soft mass that it may retain the same after its induration. Organical form, again, is innate; it unfolds itself from within. . . . In the fine arts as well as in the domain of nature—the supreme artist—all genuine forms are organical, that is determined by the quality of the work.—SCHLEGEL, *Dramatic Literature*, p. 340.

The true poet's work in its form, its shapings, and its modifications is distinguished from all other works that as-

sume to belong to the class of poetry, as a natural from an artificial flower, or as the mimic garden of a child from an enamelled meadow. In the former the flowers are broken from their stems and stuck into the ground ; they are beautiful to the eye and fragrant to the sense, but their colors soon fade and their odor is transient as the smile of the planter : — while the meadow may be visited again and again with renewed delight, its beauty is innate in the soul, and its bloom is of the freshness of nature. — *COLERIDGE, Lectures on Shakespeare*, p. 232.

Many productions which appear at first sight dazzling phenomena in the province of the fine arts, and which as a whole have been honored with the appellation of works of a golden age, resemble the mimic gardens of children : impatient to witness the works of their hands, they break off here and there branches and flowers, and plant them in the earth ; everything at first assumes a noble appearance : the childish gardener struts proudly up and down among his showy beds ; the rootless plants begin to droop and hang their withered leaves and blossoms, and nothing soon remains but the bare twigs, while the dark forest on which no art or care was ever bestowed, and which towered up towards heaven long before human remembrance, bears every blast unshaken, and fills the solitary beholder with religious awe. — *SCHLEGEL, Dramatic Literature*, p. 19.

There are some eight or nine other passages where there is the same general resemblance of simile or phrase. It is evident that Coleridge did not translate directly, but that he read Schlegel's lectures in the German and afterwards recalled and appropriated parts of them unconsciously in his notes. It would be absurd to say that he 'lifted' phrases, for he had a superabundance of them at the point of his pen. Mr. Saintsbury says, justly, that Coleridge cannot be held accountable for anything in *Literary Remains*, for it was not printed until some years after his death.

But the nightingale passage appears also in the report of his lectures at Bristol printed in 1813 in the *Bristol Gazette*. (*Lectures on Shakespeare*, page 464.) The report was either furnished by Coleridge or taken by shorthand, no doubt the latter. He evidently re-read his old notes before going on the platform. If he took any papers to his desk, he usually made little use of them. A comparison of the extracts will, however, convince any one that there is far more life and warmth in Coleridge's words than in Schlegel's. The resemblances testify simply to his receptivity and to his want of system in preparing his notes. Coleridge and Schlegel occupied much the same critical ground, but Coleridge never follows the other in his mistakes, as, for instance, in regarding Othello as a negro, nor in his extraordinary statement that *Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* are not only 'unquestionably Shakespeare's, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and most mature works.' Coleridge was far too sound a critic and far too deeply imbued with knowledge of Elizabethan literature to make such a statement.

That the Englishman and the German agree in regarding Shakespeare as a consummate artist and not a 'wild irregular genius,' and in calling his plays not tragedies or comedies in the old sense, but 'romantic dramas,' is due to the fact that both are enthusiastic spokesmen of the romantic spirit. A critic is one who loves literature naturally, and is disposed to point out to others the beauty of the parts and of the whole of any fine production. A great critic is one who loves literature warmly for itself and not from any professional bias, and is impelled to call the attention of others to what he loves, and can put his appreciations in language that compels assent,—indeed, is itself literature. If he

analyzes, he must not do so with the systematic pitilessness of a machine, and above all, he must not bring the literature of one period to the bar and try to measure it by standards deduced from the practices of a remote time and a foreign country, since every people develops its art independently. He must comprehend the radical differences between the Greek and the Goth and the greatness of each, even if he rank Greek art higher than that of his own race. He must regard the classical tradition as a frame in which beautiful things were constructed by the spirit of man,—so beautiful as to be immortal,—but not as the only possible frame for literary art, nor, on the other hand, as so far outworn that every departure from its fashions is necessarily praiseworthy because freed from restraint. Romantic enthusiasm is not always inspiration.

If we measure Coleridge by these considerations, he is a great critic, not merely of Shakespeare, but of poetry,—one of those who broaden the ideal view of their contemporaries and successors, and emancipate the spirit of man from superstitions.

**CHARLES LAMB (1775-1834)**

Lamb's sympathetic insight into literature, his mastery of the quaint and the dexterous phrase, the personal appeal to the reader of his unique and charming style, and his happy facility of quotation, gave him more importance as a literary critic than can be allowed to any other man whose production is so limited. His specimens from the old dramatists, with illustrative notes, made men see that Shakespeare's contemporaries also possessed some of the minor Shakespearean qualities, and showed that Shakespeare was but one, though the greatest, of a body of playwrights, and not a unique phenomenon. In reading the plays of Beaumont,

Fletcher, and Massinger, we become more than before aware of Shakespeare's distinction. Lamb is a great critic, and he is so attractive a person that it is almost impossible to disagree with him. Even when he is most whimsical or paradoxical, or seems to admire the book because it is old and he has discovered it, he says so many admirable things which compel our assent that we are forced to admit that when he is most personal he is most delightful. His Shakespearean criticism is confined almost entirely to his article on the Tragedies of Shakespeare, in which his thesis is that the Tragedies are too great for stage representation.

He makes his strongest point on *Lear*. In proving that it is too great to be acted, he impresses on the reader's mind the immense power of the play. The passage may be found in the preface or notes to every edition of the play, but cannot become hackneyed by repetition:—

To see Lear acted—to see an old man turned out of doors by his daughters on a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm he goes out in is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements than any actor can be to represent Lear; they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures.<sup>1</sup> The greatness

<sup>1</sup> But is not that a reason why a great actor can represent Lear? Again, all the Shakespearean heroes are men of physical strength,—great minds in perfect frames; Macbeth, the captain of rude levies, not less than Hamlet, 'the courtier, soldier' (athlete), who droops when he foregoes 'all custom of exercises.' The part of the fool in *Lear*, that lovable compound of whim and faithfulness, simplicity and worldly wisdom,—serving at

of Lear is not in corporal dimensions, but in intellectual. The explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano, they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. The case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weaknesses, the impotence of rage; while we read it we see not Lear, but we are Lear, — we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storm, in the aberrations of his reason we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children he reminds them that ‘they themselves are old’? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or eye to do with such things?

Whatever we think of the thesis, — ‘the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on the stage than those of almost any other dramatist,’ — we must admit that the above is a true appreciation of Lear. When he says of *The Tempest*, ‘The Garden of Eden, with our first parents in it, is not more impossible to be shown on a stage than the enchanted isle with its interesting and innocent first settlers,’ we assent. His illustrations from *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* are not so convincing. He overlooks the distinction between dramatic qualities and literary or poetic qualities. The

once as relief and background for the frightful anarchy that invades the faculties of his master, — is quite as difficult as that of the warm-hearted, impetuous old king. But because an embodiment is difficult is no reason why it should be abandoned.

dramatic qualities are action, situation, and dialogue. Something must be going on, and the movement of the story must be continuous. Situations must develop which are striking and interesting from either the scenic or the psychological point. The dialogue must attract attention either from its wit or from its revealing the mental state of the speakers, or from both. These are not literary qualities of a high order, and a play which contains them and some florid declamation will be successful but will not last. The higher qualities of musical verse, poetic figures, subtle soul-disclosure of a complicated human personality, ideal correspondence to the higher truths of life, which sometimes runs directly counter to the appearances of the social life of man, these make great literature. If a play possesses dramatic merit, the literary value will give it immortality ; but the dramatic qualities are absolutely essential, the poetic qualities of great literature are not essential in the same sense. Lamb's argument is, unliterary plays are sometimes received with great favor, poetic plays should disdain to compete with them. Poetic plays are more injured by inadequate acting than ordinary declamatory plays, and are ridiculous when not well acted, therefore they should not be acted at all. What he says might apply to *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale*, in which the true dramatic qualities are feeble, but not to *Hamlet* nor to *Lear*, which are at once dramatic and literary plays. In fact, the part of Hamlet is more difficult than the part of Lear, except that the latter requires more physical power.

Lamb was an excellent critic of acting, as is shown in his paper 'On Some of the Old Actors' and 'On the Acting of Munden.' In both he considers the minor, whimsical character parts. He had seen John Kemble and his sister, Mrs. Siddons, in the chief Shakespearean

parts, and Edmund Kean in *Othello*, to witness whose performances was, Coleridge said, like 'seeing Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.' Lamb was so fastidious a critic and so devout a worshiper of Shakespeare that he may sometimes have been displeased with Kemble's level declamation and Kean's explosiveness. But he knew that Shakespeare's tragedies were written for the stage and for a certain company, and the great parts with the powers of the actor Burbage always in the writer's mind, very likely after many consultations with him. There is nothing to show that Shakespeare ever regarded his dramas as anything more than acting plays. He wrote them with the stage in view, but, being a poet, he made them literature. Lamb confesses that a character in a book is but half revealed, that we must supply bodily presence, gesture, bearing—all but words—from our own imaginations. A fine actor works these things out and presents his 'reading.' We can find fault with his reading without taking the ground that the histrionic art is always inadequate. Lamb confesses the pleasure he received from seeing John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons in the principal parts of a tragedy of Shakespeare. With whimsical ingenuity he turns this into an argument for his theme.

It seemed to embody and realise conceptions which had hitherto assumed no distinct shape. But dearly do we pay all our life after for this juvenile pleasure, this sense of distinctness. When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that instead of realising an idea we have only materialised and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. *We have let go a dream in quest of an unattainable substance.*

If Sarah Siddons and her brother disillusionized Lamb, then there is nothing to be said for the stage. Romantic tragedy is impossible. He seems a little capricious in saying :—

I confess myself utterly unable to appreciate that celebrated soliloquy in *Hamlet* beginning 'To be or not to be,' or to tell whether it be good, bad, or indifferent, it has been so handled and pawed about by declamatory boys and men, and torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play till it is become to me a perfect dead member.

Nothing in Shakespeare can be vulgarized by repetition and quotation. The old familiar household words when found again in their places assume a new beauty, as we are told the faces of friends will in heaven. Whether detached or in its place, 'To be or not to be' is, like a starlit night, always new and beautiful. Lamb is capricious, but his affected anger is a humorous phase of his reverence for the plays and his artistic comprehension. Every one of his words on the subject is precious.

**WILLIAM HAZLITT (1778-1830)**

Hazlitt, the son of a Unitarian minister who had spent some time in Massachusetts, was bred to be a painter, but drifted into literary work. He did not fail as a painter, though his artistic ability could not have been as great as his powers as an essayist. He does not write as a painter, for the visual image of the Shakespearean situations does not strike him so much as the purely poetic qualities of the play. In the passages he quotes for illustration the verbal harmony, the wit, or the eloquence appeal to him more than the picturesque setting or the dramatic surroundings. He was by no means so fine a scholar as Coleridge, nor even as Lamb, for his reading did not cover much more than two centuries of English literature, and of the literatures of other nations he knew little or nothing. He never alludes to the unities nor to any of the classical rules, nor to the

question of the order in which the plays were written ; it is a matter of indifference to him whether *Lear* or *Twelfth Night* be the older, so sure is he that there are beautiful things in each. He is the spiritual son of Coleridge, but he cares nothing for metaphysics ; he is a romanticist in his enthusiasm and his independence of classic authority, but he has nothing of the vagueness or the sense of the mystery of life and the immanence of the spiritual world which mark the true romanticist.

His deficiencies would seem to preclude him from being a great critic ; but such is his own wit, eloquence, and enthusiasm, and so unerring is his perception of the beautiful and powerful in language, that he is one of the most inspiring of the many men that have written or lectured on poetry. He can hardly be called a dramatic critic, for he ignores the subjects of dramatic construction, of unity, of tone, and the like, nor is he particularly felicitous in the analysis of the character ; but he is emphatically a literary critic. He regards each play by itself, and does not wander off into considerations about æsthetics or morals or the philosophy of literature. Only one outside interest was allowed to bias his judgment of a literary work, and that, oddly enough as it seems to us, was politics. He was a man of bitter temper, and an uncompromising radical. He hated privilege and the conservative classes with a pungency which made him break with Coleridge after the latter's return to conservatism, though he never failed to do justice to Coleridge's genius, and speaks in a well-known passage with peculiar fervor of its awakening power on himself. He was an Ishmaelite among essay writers ; and an Ishmaelite of literary genius is apt to make enemies. Charles Lamb was about the only man with whom he did not quarrel, and no one could quarrel with

Lamb, whose simple, lovable nature would disarm even a more cantankerous person than William Hazlitt.

Kings of Denmark or Britain are too remote to arouse him, but when he discusses kings of England his political passion comes between him and his subject, so that he sees everything through a red mist. He cannot do justice to Henry V the King, though he is too good a critic not to feel the poetry of *Henry V* the play. He says:

Henry V is a very favorite monarch with the English nation, and he appears to have been a favorite with Shakespeare, who labors hard to apologise for the actions of the King by showing us the character of the man as the 'King of good fellows.' He scarcely deserves this honor. He was fond of war and low company ; we know little else of him. He was careless, dissolute, and ambitious ; idle or doing mischief. . . . Henry V, it is true, was a hero, a king of England, and the conqueror of the King of France. Yet we feel little love or admiration for him. He was a hero ; that is, he was ready to sacrifice his own life for the pleasure of destroying thousands of other lives ; he was a king of England, but not a constitutional one, and we only like kings according to the law ; lastly, he was a conqueror of the French King, and for this we dislike him less than if he had conquered the French people. How then do we like him ? We like him in the play. There he is a very amiable monster, a very splendid pageant. As we like to gaze at a panther, or a young lion, in the Tower, and catch a pleasing horror from their glistening eyes, their velvet paws, and dreadful roar, so we take a very romantic, heroic, and poetical delight in the boasts and feats of our younger Henry, as they appear on the stage and are confined to lines of ten syllables.

Henry VIII arouses the critic's ire still more powerfully : —

The character of Henry VIII is drawn with great truth and spirit. It is like a very disagreeable portrait sketched by

the hand of a master. His gross appearance, his blustering demeanor, his vulgarity, his arrogance, his sensuality, his cruelty, his hypocrisy, his want of common decency and common humanity are marked in strong lines. . . . Kings ought never to be seen upon the stage. In the abstract they are very disagreeable characters ; it is only while living that they are the best of kings. . . . Death cancels the bond of allegiance and interest ; and seen as they were, their power and their pretensions look monstrous and ridiculous. . . . No reader of history can be a lover of kings. We have often wondered that Henry VIII, as he is drawn by Shakespeare, and as we have seen him represented in all the bloated deformity of mind and person, is not hooted from the English stage.

That, of course, is not dramatic criticism at all. If it were, Macbeth would be condemned as sternly as the Henrys. It is republicanism of the reign of George IV, a noble political passion no doubt, and the inspiration of eloquence, but not of literary art, to which the question whether a character is liberal or conservative is of little moment compared with the question, does the character live ? Kings should be put upon the stage, for a certain dignity and interest attaches to their positions, and they are conventional figureheads of society. They suggest something far more important than the individual. If they are, like Henry V, able as men of action and striking in their representative character, the dramatist is doubly justified. If they are neither, like Henry VI, they are hardly less so, so effective is the contrast between what is and what should be. Besides, kings, courts, councils, and the like are spectacular, and spectacle is a legitimate part of the drama. No effective picture of society can be made that does not portray the highest as well as the lowest groups, and the highest and lowest motives in humanity. This was Shakespeare's art, and in bringing them sometimes close together he was

following out the artistic impulse of the Teutonic race.

Hazlitt's politics interfere oddly in his appreciation of the *Merchant of Venice*. There is an aristocratic atmosphere about this play. Antonio is a merchant prince without a trace of the commercial spirit, and lends money to a bankrupt gentleman with a lordly disregard of payment. Portia is a high-bred lady, with all the paraphernalia of a 'fair mansion,' attendants, musicians, and the like; so great an heiress that her courtship is intrusted to chance. All this irritates Hazlitt extremely, so much so that not only he overlooks the womanly beauty of Portia's character, but, what is unprecedented with him, he fails to do full justice to the poetic passages of the play. His sympathies are with Shylock, jeered at and insulted by the aristocratic Venetian gentlemen, as their English counterparts of the Regent's set jeered at and insulted Hazlitt himself, if they did not ignore him utterly. After expressing his admiration of the dramatic skill with which the trial scene is worked up, he says:—

Portia is not a very great favorite with us; neither are we in love with her maid, Nerissa. Portia has a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her, which is very unusual in Shakespeare's women, but which perhaps was a proper qualification for the office of a 'civil doctor' which she undertakes and executes very successfully. The speech about mercy is very well; but there are a thousand finer ones in Shakespeare. We do not admire the scene of the caskets and object entirely to the Black Prince, Morochius. We should like Jessica better if she had not deceived and robbed her father, and Lorenzo if he had not married a Jewess, though he thinks he has a right to wrong a Jew. The dialogue between this newly married couple by moonlight beginning, 'On such a night, etc.,' is a collection of classical elegancies.

This political radicalism led him to speak satirically of Coleridge and Wordsworth, who became conservative in middle life, and also of Scott. His *Characters of Shakespeare*, dedicated to Lamb, and his *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* are his chief contributions to dramatic criticism. His radicalism rarely warps his appreciation of literature, for that was his master passion. Of Coleridge he wrote:

Hardly a speculation has been left on record from the earliest time, but it is loosely folded up in Coleridge's memory, like a rich but somewhat tattered piece of tapestry ; we might add (with more seeming than real extravagance), that scarce a thought can pass through the mind of man, but its sound has at some time or other passed over his head with rustling pinions. There is no man of genius in whose praise he descants, but the critic seems to stand above the author, and what in him is weak to strengthen, what is low to raise and support — nor is there any work of genius that does not come out of his hands like an illuminated missal, sparkling even in its defects. If Mr. Coleridge had not been the most impressive talker of his age, he would probably have been the finest writer ; but he lays down his pen to make sure of an auditor and mortgages the admiration of posterity for the stare of an idler.

Scott's legitimacy and king worship was peculiarly offensive to him. He defines Scott's poetry as a 'pleasing superficiality,' which may be true enough. Of his novels he says :—

Sir Walter has found out (oh, rare discovery) that facts are better than fiction, that there is no romance like the romance of real life. . . . He has taken his material from the original, authentic sources, in large concrete masses, and not tampered with or too much frittered them away. He is only the amanuensis of truth and history. It is impossible to say how fine his writings in consequence are, unless we could describe how fine

nature is. In all that portion of the history of his country that he has touched on, the manners, the personages, the events, the scenery, live over again in his volumes. Nothing is wanting, the illusion is complete. There is a hurtling in the air, a trampling of feet upon the ground, as these perfect representatives of human character or fanciful belief come thronging back on our imaginations.

He then gives two pages to the most wonderful catalogue in literature, characterizing each name with a line or two that makes it live again, and concludes :—

What a list of names ! What a host of associations ! What a thing is human life ! What a power is that of genius ! What a world of thought and feeling is thus rescued from oblivion ! . . . His worst is better than any other person's best. His back-grounds (and his later works are little else but back-grounds capitally made out) are more attractive than the principal figures and most complicated actions of other writers. His works, taken together, are almost like a new edition of human nature. This is indeed to be an author !

He notes with astonishment the innumerable and incessant instances of bad and slovenly English in the novels, and concludes with an eloquent lament that his writer —

Born for the universe, narrowed his mind,  
And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.

In prose it is what Pope's lament for Addison is in verse. But Hazlitt keeps his literary admiration and his political detestation in separate pages. In either case he puts feeling into his prose. He lets himself go. His vigorous style betrays the man as the oddly associated thoughts and far-fetched quotations do Lamb. This gives his essays on Shakespeare interest. To use his favorite word, they have 'gusto.' They are inspiring rather than instructive, and inspiration is what men

need. Facts they can pick up anywhere ; like Falstaff's soldiers, they can 'find linen enough on every hedge,' but where are they to pick up notions of military honor ?

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is especially dear to him both for the poetry and the humor, but he thinks when acted it is 'converted from a delightful fiction unto a dull pantomime.'

All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand, but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled, . . . the idea can have no place on the stage, which is a picture without perspective, everything there is in the foreground. That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. Fancy cannot be embodied any more than a simile can be painted ; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate Wall or Moonshine. . . . The boards of a theatre and the region of fancy are not the same thing.

In *The Tempest* he remarks on the artistic unity of the composition, 'though Shakespeare has here given "to airy nothing a local habitation and a name," yet that part which is only the fantastic creation of his mind, has the same palpable texture and coheres semblably with the rest. The human and imaginary characters, the dramatic and the grotesque, are blended together with the greatest art and without any appearance of it.' As the preternatural part has the air of reality and almost haunts the imagination with a sense of truth, the real characters and events partake of the wildness of a dream. He says :—

Shakespeare's pencil is, to use an allusion of his own, 'like the dyer's hand,' subdued to what it works in. Everything in him, though it partakes of the 'liberty of wit,' is also subjected to the law of the understanding. For instance, even the drunken sailors share, in the disorder of their minds and

bodies, in the tumult of the elements, and seem on shore to be as much at the mercy of chance as they were before at the mercy of the winds and waves.

The character of Caliban is generally thought — and justly so — to be one of the author's masterpieces. It is not indeed pleasant to see this character on the stage, any more than it is to see the god Pan personated there. But in itself it is one of the wildest and most abstracted of all Shakespeare's characters ; whose deformity, whether of body or mind, is redeemed by the power and truth of the imagination displayed in it. It is the essence of grossness, but there is not a particle of vulgarity in it. Shakespeare has described the brutal mind of Caliban in contrast with the pure and original forms of nature ; the character grows out of the soil where it is rooted, uncontrolled, uncouth, and wild, uncramped by any of the meannesses of custom. It is 'of the earth, earthy.' *It seems almost to have been dug out of the ground,* with a soul instinctively superadded to it, answering to its wants and origin.

In his paper on *Lear* Hazlitt writes :—

All that we can say must fall far short of the subject, or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. . . . It is the greatest of all Shakespeare's plays, for it is the one in which he was most in earnest. He was here *fairly caught in the web of his own imagination*. The passion which he has taken as his subject is that which strikes its root deepest into the human heart, of which the bond is the hardest to be unloosed ; and the cancelling and tearing to pieces of which gives the greatest revulsion to the frame.

To say that Shakespeare here was 'caught in the web of his imagination' apparently contradicts what he had so finely said in his critique on *The Tempest* : 'Everything in him, though it partakes of the liberty of wit, is also subject to the law of understanding,' but a critic like Hazlitt, who flashes a penetrating light first

on one then on another of the Shakespearean structures, cannot be held always to the same disclosure.<sup>1</sup> When he is writing on Lear the relation of father and daughter seems to him the most sacred and beautiful of ties. Hazlitt sees distinctly before him the play he is criticising. Had he thought of *Hamlet* or *Othello*, he would have felt that the bond between mother and son or between husband and wife is no less fundamental, and its violation fraught with no less profound a moral catastrophe than the unnatural disregard of the filial relation by Lear's daughters. One of the great values of Shakespeare's tragedies is that the motive force in each is one of the primal, underlying instincts of humanity, or, at least, of Teutonic humanity, on which the entire social order rests. It is this which gives them their universal appeal. The early notion of tragedy, as seen in Chaucer's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (The Monke's Tale) is stories of men who had fallen from prosperity to adversity. The monk begins:—

I wol biwayle in maner of Tragedie,  
The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree,  
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie  
To bringe hem out of hir adversitee.

This is concrete misfortune, no doubt a very serious matter, and one which the most thoughtless can understand; but Shakespeare made the stuff of tragedy to consist in an outrage to the soul, so that a man might be a tragic figure while outwardly prosperous — an hon-

<sup>1</sup> Of the admirable passage beginning 'The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,' Hazlitt says, 'It has been so often quoted that *every school-boy* knows it by heart.' Of Byron he says, 'He dwells chiefly (in *Childe Harold*) on what is familiar to *every school-boy*.' Here is 'Macaulay's school-boy' appearing in print while Macaulay was still at school. Is he not really 'Hazlitt's school-boy'?

ored general, a ‘chiefest courtier,’ or an ex-king, vexed only by trifling inattentions. The ‘minds’ of all ‘are full of scorpions.’ As Hazlitt comes to write of each, he feels for each ; but he does not generalize — and perhaps it is as well — nor see that in each case the tragic motive strikes the same ‘deep root into the human heart,’ far deeper than ‘mutation of fortune’ can reach.

He sympathizes deeply with Hamlet, for ‘the play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history.’ There was a restless intensity of spirit in Hazlitt, and a sense of the mystery of life and of the irony of things, which drew him to the Danish Prince whom no one precisely understands. He makes the excellent criticism :—

Shakespeare had more of the magnanimity of genius than any other poet, and he has shown more of it in this play than in any other. There is no attempt to force our interest; everything is left to time and circumstances. The attention is excited without premeditation or effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they would do if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene — the gnsts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind.

There is undoubtedly justice in this. There is very little of the ‘constructed plot’ in the play. Things drift under the influence of the characters and the situation. Hazlitt was much stronger in pointing out detachable poetic beauties and in appreciating the atmosphere — the *Ethos* — of the entire play than in analyzing the characters. Like his contemporaries he is misled by the pathos of Ophelia’s position.

Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh, rose of May, oh, flower too soon faded!<sup>1</sup> Her love, her death, are described with the truest touches of ten-

<sup>1</sup> This passage recalls Schlegel’s words on the same character.

derness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespeare could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach except in some of the old romantic ballads.

Shakespeare's characters are so much like natural products that a certain amount of scientific realism is necessary to their interpretation. The romanticist allows his feelings to carry him away in contemplating the innocent and the unfortunate, and Hazlitt, with all his bitterness and radicalism, is at heart a romanticist. His pessimism is amusingly shown in his critique on *Twelfth Night*. This, he thinks, is 'full of sweetness and pleasantry.' 'It is perhaps too good-natured for comedy.' 'It has little satire and no spleen.' 'It aims at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous,' and makes us 'laugh at the follies of mankind rather than despise them.' But that is the true nature of the comic spirit. It is amused, not indignant with the world. It cannot be 'too good-natured'; its very essence is high spirits combined with whimsical insight. It reinstates Malvolio, and draws no moral from Toby and the foolish Knight. It leaves Satire to the severer muse of *Measure for Measure*. This Hazlitt thinks a play as 'full of genius as it is of wisdom,' though there is an 'original sin in the nature of the subject which prevents us from taking a cordial interest in it.' Hazlitt is never quite consistent, for if a comedy should make us 'despise mankind,' *Measure for Measure* is a model. But he is always consistent in his love for poetry.

His paper on *Macbeth* strikes out many things that are now the commonplaces of criticism; the underlying superstition of the murderer, the combination of moral weakness and physical strength in him, the darkness and gloom so continually used as figures, the abruptness of the style so harmonious with the violence of the

action, are all referred to with force and point. In speaking of Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth, he says:—

We can conceive of nothing grander. It was something above nature. It seemed almost as if a being of a superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine ; she was tragedy personified. In coming on from the sleeping scene, her eyes were open but their sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily—all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition. To have seen her in that character was an event in one's life not to be forgotten.

He notices that Shakespeare excelled in the openings of his plays, and reverts again to the sense of reality the poet imparts to his scene :—

The Castle of Macbeth, round which the ‘air smells woefully’ and where the ‘temple-haunting martlett builds,’ has a real subsistence in the mind ; the weird Sisters meet us in person on the ‘blasted heath’ ;<sup>1</sup> the ‘air-drawn dagger’ moves slowly before our eyes ; the ‘gracious Duncan,’ the blood-holted Banquo stand before us ; all that passed through the mind of Macbeth passes, without the loss of a tittle, through ours.

Hazlitt mentioned Schlegel with high commendation, and quotes freely from him. At the same time he derives directly from Coleridge. There is little of the habitual reference to related principles of human nature and art, and nothing of the wide reading of the great master of criticism in the brilliant discourse of the younger man ; but it is plain that he has been roused with a contagious enthusiasm — his ‘eye glares

<sup>1</sup> Is not that phrase very remotely a reminiscence of Maurice Morgann ? See page 161.

with the frenzy of a kindred inspiration.' It is easy to say that Hazlitt 'adds nothing to the sum of human information.' That may be true, but he adds to the sum of poetic enjoyment, a much more important increment. His work may be called 'sign-board criticism' by those who without a sign-board would not know what to admire. At all events his sign-board is illuminated from time to time with electric flashes, that show the road to be quite other than we thought it.

Hazlitt is directly in line with the great English critics, from Coleridge to Bradley. His very want of any theory of art was one of his excellences, for it enabled him to fix his attention on the poetry, which is lasting, and not on a system of rules which changes with every generation. We cannot say that what he says we would 'have found out for ourselves,' for that would be to credit ourselves with his insight. Again, a thought expressed by a writer like Hazlitt has vitality, for it is the form that gives thought germinal power. When a thought or a point of view has become part of the traditional stock, the next generation says, 'That is true, but it is too obvious. It is a mere rhetorical commonplace. Give us something mystical that we can pretend to understand, and in doing so enjoy a sense of superiority.' They forget that a great many things that are now obvious were not so till genius pointed them out.

While Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt were writing on the poetry and philosophy of the plays in the tone of enthusiastic romanticism, another set of critics confined themselves to elucidating the text and publishing new editions. Some of them published commentaries, or, as they were usually called, *Illustrations of Shakespeare*. Among them were Francis Douce (1757–1834), Joseph Hunter (1783–1861), Joseph Singer (1786–1866),

Alexander Dyce (1798–1869), Charles Knight (1790–1873), and John Payne Collier (1789–1883). These men were diligent workers in the Shakespearean field, and their contributions have been carefully sifted and the wheat separated from the chaff in the notes of Mr. Furness's *Variorum*. As a rule they were antiquaries of the early nineteenth-century type, and, with the possible exception of Knight, did little to promote the æsthetic appreciation of the plays.

Mr. Douce's two volumes of *Illustrations of Shakespeare*, 1808, are among the most entertaining and instructive books on the subject. They contain comments on the readings in Steevens's edition, which are marked throughout by good sense and good temper. Especially valuable is the article on the 'clowns and fools' from the fourteenth century down, and the notes on early social customs and superstitions, such as blessing the marriage bed, the 'Morris dance,' the betrothal, lace-making, the fairies, etc. These are illustrated by very interesting reproductions of ancient woodcuts. No book contributes more to reproducing the atmosphere of Old England. Mr. Douce's minute learning and retentive memory enable him to supply a wealth of illustrative passages from early authors, though his parallelisms are sometimes rather far-fetched.

Charles Knight's *Pictorial Shakespeare*, completed in 1841, is well known,—a sumptuous illustrated book, the plates by the best artists of the time. His Cabinet Edition was also well received. In both he prudently adheres to the First Folio in questions of disputed readings. These and the handsomely printed edition of Alexander Chalmers in nine volumes (1809), based on the work of Steevens, are, however, little more than publishers' ventures.

John Payne Collier's *History of English Dramatic*

*Poetry*, 1883, is a work involving a great deal of research, and is valuable for throwing light on the development of the theatre. In 1854 he published a single-volume edition of the plays, adopting a multitude of new readings on the authority of written notes in a copy of the Second Folio he had purchased. He adhered to these emendations in his six-volume edition of 1858. His contention was that the marginal notes in his copy of the folio, known from the name of one of its owners as the 'Perkins Folio,' were made in the seventeenth century before the Restoration, and consequently by some one who had heard the plays given by actors who were governed by traditions of the author's stage directions. The question of the value of these thirteen hundred corrections is treated exhaustively by Richard Grant White in the *Shakespeare Scholar*, and it is shown that most of them had been anticipated, and few, not more than 117, are even plausible. He, however, acquits Collier of conscious deceit. On the question of their genuineness, experts have shown that they are in two different handwritings and that some of them are palpably modern forgeries. It is difficult to determine how far Mr. Collier is guilty; probably he at first deceived himself and then was tempted to buttress his cause by forgery. He also presented several Elizabethan documents which are plainly forgeries but were copied in reputable publications. A letter from the Earl of Southampton concerning Burbage and Shakespeare is likely to startle the student in the preface to some of the early nineteenth-century editions, for it is a very ingenious and plausible fabrication. The matter created great excitement at the time, and Mr. Collier behaved exactly like an innocent person. The question, though interesting, does not bear on criticism, least of all on æsthetic criticism, and need not detain us.

Collier discovered in the British Museum a manuscript diary of John Maningham, containing an interesting account of the first presentation of *Twelfth Night* before the lawyers' society, February 2, 1602, at the Middle Temple. Collier misquotes it in his *History of Dramatic Poetry*, and it was afterwards found by Hunter, who claims — apparently — original discovery. Hunter unearthed the personality of John Maningham, and, following out the reference to the Italian play *G'l Inganni* (the cheats), showed that the plot bears more resemblance to *G'l Inganniti* (the cheated), making it slightly probable that Shakespeare could read Italian.

Joseph Hunter was a man of curious, antiquarian learning, and we are indebted to him for his *Collections concerning the Founders of New Plymouth, N. E.* He published in 1845 two volumes of *Illustrations of the Life, Studies, and Writings of Shakespeare*. He made the extraordinary mistake of regarding *The Tempest* as an early play and the original of *Love's Labour's Won*, mentioned by Meres. This of course deprives him of the least consideration as a judge of literature, but in several cases his out-of-the-way learning enables him to throw new light on obscure passages and obsolete expressions. He inclines to give too much authority to the Second Folio in cases of considerable variation. His book is full of instances of parallelisms from literature contemporary with Shakespeare, usually more curious than convincing. He gives a full account of the name of Shakespeare and its variants, from *Shagsper* and *Saxpere* down, and a history of Shakespeare's father's family and descendants, in which he adds little to the researches of Malone.

Joseph Singer brought out a ten-volume edition in 1826, characterized by careful collection of existing authorities and commentaries, giving to the First Folio

preponderant authority. Later he attacked Collier's emendations with great vigor.

Alexander Dyce, known for his editions of the plays of Middleton, Beaumont and Fletcher, Marlowe, Webster, and Greene, published an edition of Shakespeare in nine volumes in 1857, and another in 1864, in which he retracted many of his former readings. In spite of his unfortunate indecisions, his textual criticism is of high value, and his glossary excellent. His remarks on Knight's and Collier's editions (1854) revive the tradition of good, old eighteenth-century critical vituperation; *e. g.*, of Knight's *Hamlet* he remarks with candor, 'of which tragedy his text is beyond all doubt the worst that has appeared in modern times.' 'To suppose (as Caldecot does) that "the most fond and winnowed opinions" could mean all judgments, not the simplest only, but the most sifted and wisest, is little short of insanity.'

'What he says here about Cleopatra's "wand lip" (*i. e.*, that her lip is as potent as a magician's wand) cannot be allowed the merit of originality; at least it had been previously said in that mass of folly, ignorance, and conceit, Jackson's *Shakespeare's Genius Justified*.'

O good old man, how well in thee appears  
The constant [wrangling] of the antique world.

The above is by no means an exhaustive list of the commentaries up to 1850, when the work was sifted by the editors of the Cambridge Edition.

Thomas Tyrwhitt (1730–86), the learned editor of Chaucer, published anonymously in 1776 *Observations and Conjectures upon Some Passages of Shakespeare*, and gave many suggestions to Malone. William Sidney Walker (1795–1846) was an acute textual critic.

His *Critical Examination and Notes on the Plays and Poems* was not published till after his death, and is of recognized value. But most of the men mentioned were merely antiquarians, 'wrapped in the funeral shroud of erudition.' They hunt up microscopic facts with little reference to their correlation ; they throw light on the meaning of the text, not on its significance. They say nothing of the plays as poetry beyond referring to the force or harmony of individual lines. Characters, construction, and philosophy, the higher technical qualities and the higher poetic qualities, they ignore. Between these and such critics as Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt there is a great gulf fixed. They illustrate one side of English historical scholarship, the uninspired side. Their virtues are industry and good sense, and they evince their good sense by dealing with material suited to their powers. They do not in any way illustrate and forward the progress of the human mind as the others do.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FOREIGN CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE

ALTHOUGH the object of this book is to trace the course of English appreciation of Shakespeare's plays as shown in a few of the most authoritative writers, German and French criticism has, since the eighteenth century, reacted so profoundly on English thought that a brief outline of the most important of the foreign writings is necessary even in a general sketch of the subject. At present, translations of Shakespeare's plays are more frequently, and on the whole better, presented in Germany and Austria than the originals are in England and America. This is owing, first, to the existence in all the important continental cities of theatres under official control and aided by the state or municipality; second, to the thorough and painstaking manner in which Germans carry out any undertaking; and third, to the fact that they have not fallen into the habit of lavish expenditure in scenic decoration which in our country, and in England, too, has made the cost of the representation of a Shakespearean play so great as to be almost prohibitive, besides distracting the audience from imaginative appreciation of the play. It is greatly to be regretted that the popular educative value of Shakespeare's wonderful art is therefore largely lost among those who speak his language; indeed, it is nothing less than a national misfortune; but at present we can only regret it without much hope for its amelioration.

A translation of a great poem is at best but a shadow and a suggestion of the original, for the substance is so

intimately connected with the form, and even with minor elements of the form—the versification, the phrasing, the peculiar poetic association with certain words—that it can never be reproduced except in a few happy instances when a lyric carried from one language into another is a new poem equal to the original. German lends itself admirably to translations, and the Germans are Teutonic, and in consequence much of the substance and form of a Shakespearean play is not foreign to them. They have perfected laboriously, and with an approximation to the spirit of the original, their translation since the day of Schlegel, but there are elements which must necessarily escape them. The humor of each nation is its own, and no one who has not been familiar with it since childhood can readily take the national humorous attitude. Even the dull come to have a vague comprehension of the popular form of jesting, which remains more or less incomprehensible to the cultured foreigner, or at best is regarded *ab extra*, as something peculiar and amusing but not germane to him. Novalis (F. von Hardenberg) said that he could not understand Shakespeare's fun, and that the humor of Aristophanes was more comprehensible to him. Rarely, too, can the entire content of an English word be felt by one who has learned the language at school, and very rarely, unless it be some concrete thing or a simple physical action, can it be fully rendered by a foreign word. Take a simple case. Falstaff has been much amused by the senile boasts of Mr. Justice Shallow. He recalls the time when Shallow was at Clement's Inn, a foolish youth, and, contrasting his past insignificance with his present position, says: 'And now has he land and *beees*.' There is no other word in the language to take the place of 'beees,' with its subtle suggestion of rural opulence. Certainly

'cattle' or 'steers' would be much weaker, and it may be doubted whether there is another word in any language that would have the slight humorous effect of 'beees.' This difficulty renders the best translation inadequate, and leads the foreign critic into mistakes which the native, even of inferior culture, instinctively avoids. But there is so much of Shakespeare besides humor and phrasing, that the Germans, and in a less degree the French, do possess him, and what they have to say is entitled to respect on higher grounds than curiosity to learn how a national literature strikes foreigners.

In the seventeenth century France was the arbiter of elegance for Germany, especially in the drama. A very curious importation of dramatic themes from England had taken place earlier, but had been forgotten. The French drama was completely under the influence of the classical tradition, and Corneille and Racine were imitated on the German stage. This influence was combated by Lessing, poet, philosopher, art-critic, playwright, and in addition a man of admirable judgment and independence of character. His dramatic and theatrical criticism is contained chiefly in *Literary Letters* and *Dramatic Notes* on the plays presented in the Hamburg Theatre (1767-69). In these he incidentally maintains the superiority of Shakespeare in the essentials of dramatic art, and declares that the French writers adhered to the form and misunderstood the spirit of Aristotle's rules. He compares the ghost in *Hamlet* to the ghost in Voltaire's *Sémiramis*, greatly to the disadvantage of the Frenchman. Of the unity of time in the same writer's *Mérope* he says :—

What good does it do the poet, that the particular actions that occur in every act would not require much more time for their real occurrence than is occupied by the representa-

tion of each act, and that this time, including what is absorbed between the acts, would not require a complete revolution of the sun ; has he therefore regarded the unity of time ? He has fulfilled the words of the rule, but not their spirit. For what he lets happen in one day can be done in one day, it is true, but no sane mortal would do it in one day. Physical unity of time is not sufficient, the moral unity must also be considered.

He quotes with approbation from the English critic, Hurd : —

Shakespeare, we may observe, in this [delineation of human parts], as in all the more essential beauties of the drama, is a perfect model. If the discerning reader peruse attentively his comedies, he will find his best marked characters discoursing through a great deal of their parts just like any others, and only expressing their essential and leading qualities occasionally, and as circumstances occur to give an easy exposition to them.

It is to be regretted that no plays of Shakespeare were given at the Hamburg Theatre while Lessing was writing his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, for we should have had some criticism of the highest order. Ulrici says : ‘He commended Shakespeare, not because of single beauties in his works, in the manner of the English critics of the time, but because of beauty itself, because of the agreement of Shakespeare’s works with the true rules of art, and with the true nature of art.’

The first German translation was twenty-two plays by Wieland, published in eight volumes, from 1762 to 1766. This was in prose, and of course could give but a pale reflex of the poetic substance. Eschenburg’s complete translation soon followed, and acting versions were based on these and presented after 1780 by Schröder, a very fine actor. They received an enthusiastic welcome, but the adherents of the classic school

insisted that their beauties were more than balanced by their irregularities and that their popularity 'put back the German stage more than ten years.' The younger men, on the contrary, the first representatives of the rising romantic school, went to the other extreme, and hailed Shakespeare as an 'impetuous genius blindly following the creative caprice of his own imagination,' whose extravagancies were as admirable as his genuine and characteristic beauties. 'Imitation of nature and, moreover, of stark-naked nature as God made it' was considered 'the highest aim of art.' This resulted in the 'Sturm und Drang' period, when vigor and violence and virility were idealized, or, rather, presented in unmitigated reality. Even the great and self-possessed Goethe fell under this influence, and *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) was 'the first cupful from this ocean of true nature.' Schiller says in his criticism of his own play, *The Robbers*, 'If its beauties do not show that the author was captivated by Shakespeare, all the more must this be evident from its extravagance.' Although Goethe came later to reproduce the restraint and calmness of the classic model, it is certain that the 'first blossoms of the great period of German poetry were fructified by Shakespeare's genius.' In *Wilhelm Meister* Goethe says, semi-autobiographically:—

I do not remember that any book or person or event in my life ever produced so great an effect on me as Shakespeare's plays. They seem to be the work of some heavenly genius who came down to men to make himself known to them in as gentle a manner as possible. They are no mere poems. We could fancy that we were standing before the gigantic books of Fate, through which the hurricane of life was raging and violently blowing its leaves to and fro. I am so astounded by their strength and their tenderness, by their power and their peace, and my mind is so excited, that I

long for the time when I shall again feel myself in a fit state to read further.

Schiller, too, testifies no less warmly to his admiration of the plays, though in his adaptation of *Macbeth* he takes unwarrantable liberties with the original. Both Schiller and Goethe were aroused and inspired by the English poet, though both were too great as artists to be imitators in any sense.

Augustus William Schlegel published between 1797 and 1810 his translation of seventeen of Shakespeare's plays, and this was completed later by Tieck. This is an admirable work, for verse is rendered by verse and prose by prose. Shakespeare uses verse, and either rhetorical or conversational prose, according to the speaker and the occasion, and it is evidently impossible to reproduce the effect of a play even in a weakened form unless the distinction is observed. With the correction of some minor verbal errors, Schlegel's translation is satisfactory to-day. It has lately been revised by the German Shakespeare Society, although numerous others of varying degrees of merit were published in the nineteenth century.

Schlegel was a romanticist, and in fact is regarded in connection with his brother Frederick as the founder of the romantic school in Germany. The influence of his *Lectures on Dramatic Literature* (1808) on the English romanticists has been already alluded to. Little more than one hundred pages are directly concerned with Shakespeare, but the work is the first connected commentary on the plays in the language. It exhibits the fault of the romanticist in giving general impressions in impassioned language, and not analyzing or establishing statements by quotations. It is true, these general propositions commend themselves to us except when he says that the three parts of *Henry VI*

and *Richard III* ‘were undoubtedly composed in succession, as is proved by the style and the spirit in the handling of the subject.’ Confidence in his critical faculty receives a severe shock when we read of *Thomas Lord Cromwell, Sir John Oldcastle* (First Part), and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*: ‘These three pieces are not only unquestionably Shakespeare’s, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and maturest works.’ He falls into another but less serious error in writing of *Othello*:—

What a fortunate mistake that the Moor (under which name in the original novel a baptized Saracen of the northern coast of Africa was unquestionably meant) has been made by Shakespeare *in every respect a negro*: we recognize in Othello the wild nature of that glowing zone, which generates the most ravenous beasts of prey and the most deadly poisons, tamed only in appearance by foreign laws of honor and by nobler and milder manners. His jealousy is not the jealousy of the heart which is compatible with the tenderest feelings and adoration of the beloved object; it is of that sensual kind which in burning climes has given birth to the disgraceful confinement of women and many other unnatural usages.

To us who know the docile, childlike nature of the negro and his indifference to female exclusiveness, the above seems absurd. It is the Arab, not the Ethiopian, who instituted the ‘disgraceful confinement of women.’ But Othello is in essentials an Elizabethan gentleman, of a ‘free and noble nature,’ driven to desperation by agony of soul from the conviction that the wife he loves has proved unfaithful. Again, it is India rather than Africa which ‘generates the most ravenous beasts of prey and the most deadly poisons.’ But, apart from the above errors, Schlegel shows a broad and generous comprehension of Shakespearean art. A gen-

uine romanticist, he sets aside with scorn the rule for unity of time : —

The intriguer is ever expeditious, and loses no time in attaining to his object. But the mighty course of human destinies proceeds, like the change of seasons, with measured pace ; great designs ripen slowly ; stealthily and hesitatingly the dark suggestions of deadly malice quit the abysses of the mind for the light of day ; and, as Horace observes, with equal truth and beauty, ‘ the flying criminal is only limpingly followed by penal retribution.’<sup>1</sup> Let only the attempt be made, for instance, to bring within the narrow frame of the Unity of Time Shakespeare’s gigantic picture of Macbeth’s Murder of Duncan, his tyrannical usurpation and final fall ; let as many as may be of the events which the great dramatist successively exhibits before us in such dread array be placed anterior to the opening of the piece, and made the subject of an after recital, and it will be seen how thereby the story loses all its sublime significance. This drama does, it is true, embrace a considerable period of time : but does its rapid progress leave us leisure to calculate this ? We see as it were the Fates weaving their dark web on the whirling loom of time, and we are drawn irresistibly on by the storm and whirlwind of events, which hurries on the hero to the first atrocious deed, and, from it to innumerable crimes to secure its fruits, with fluctuating fortunes and perils, to his final fall on the field of battle.

He, too, attacks Voltaire with energy, and is justly severe on his treatment of the mysterious — a theme especially dear to romanticists — in *Sémiramis*. He holds emphatically that Shakespeare is ‘ a profound artist and not a blind and wildly extravagant genius,’ and considers the opposite opinion ‘ a mere fable, a

<sup>1</sup> Not an entirely accurate translation of

Raro antecedentem scelestum  
Deseruit pede poena clando.

But the error may be between the German and the English.

blind and extravagant error.' He notes the power of giving life to stage characters, declaring that the poet 'possesses a capability of transporting himself so completely into every situation, even the most unusual, that he is enabled as *plenipotentiary of the whole human race*, without particular instructions for each separate case, to act and speak in the name of every individual.'

The inconceivable element herein, and what, moreover, can never be learned, is that the characters appear neither to do or say anything on the spectator's account merely; and yet that the poet, simply by means of the exhibition, and without any subsidiary explanation, communicated to the audience the gift of looking into the inmost recesses of their minds. Hence Goethe has ingeniously compared Shakespeare's characters to watches with crystalline plates and cases, which, while they point out the hours as correctly as other watches, enable us at the same time to perceive the inward springs by which all this is accomplished.

The power of drawing character is as mysterious as character itself, and it is hardly possible to 'look into the inmost recesses of the minds' of the great Shakespearean characters — we only know that the 'recesses' are there. The romanticists are fond of ingenious and striking imagery. The 'roaring loom of time,' or 'the book of fate, its leaves violently stirred by the wind of life,' is frequently brought forward. Sometimes these figures are of extreme beauty, and the greatness of Coleridge is evinced by the fact that with him and, in a less degree, with Hazlitt, they are always apposite. Sometimes, as in the above from Goethe, they are beautiful but do not illustrate the subject, for Shakespeare's great characters are by no means in transparent cases. Hamlet and Iago and Macbeth are mysterious even to themselves, because they are original centres of force

and not merely motive-driven machines. Schlegel seems to recognize this indirectly in several passages. His defense of the mixture of the tragic and the comic, and the relation of each to the other as elements of dramatic art, is more philosophical than that which defends the combination merely because it is not uncommon in real life. It is at once the strength and the weakness of the German commentators that they instinctively base their criticism on some form of the peculiarly German science of æsthetics. They sometimes gain thereby systematic form at the expense of a firm hold of reality.

Goethe, in his criticism of Hamlet in *Wilhelm Meister*, which contains the beautiful simile of the oak tree planted in a porcelain vase, had said that Hamlet was a ‘lovely, pure, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinking beneath a burden (of duty) which it cannot bear and must not cast away’ — in other words, a sentimentalist, a weakling. Schlegel says : —

With respect to Hamlet’s character ; I cannot, as I understand the poet’s views, pronounce altogether so favorable a sentence upon it as Goethe does. He is, it is true, of a highly cultivated mind, a prince of royal manners, endowed with the finest sense of propriety, susceptible of noble ambition, and open in the highest degree to an enthusiastic admiration of excellence in others of which he himself is deficient. . . . He is not solely impelled by necessity to artifice and dissimulation, *he has a natural inclination for crooked ways* ; he is a hypocrite towards himself, his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination. . . . Hamlet has no firm belief either in himself or in anything else ; from expressions of religious confidence he passes over to sceptical doubts. . . . It is a tragedy of thought ; the whole is intended to show that a calculating consideration, which exhausts all the relations and possible consequences of a deed, must cripple the power of acting.

These views, or modifications of them, one gathers from reading the play as a whole, for they are the general impressions left on the mind. Hamlet does not act, therefore he is irresolute. Since the publication of Professor Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, they have merely an historical interest, for there the character is analyzed and referred to well-known though subtle elements of human nature, and the propositions are established by quotations from the play itself. In other words, Bradley's criticism is not merely an appreciation, it is also a scientific argument.

Schlegel seems to rank *Macbeth* as the greatest of the tragedies, in which opinion he is not alone. His discourse on Caliban is admirable, and his animadversions on Dr. Johnson will command general assent.

The German criticism on Shakespeare with which Americans are most familiar is Dr. Hermann Ulrici's *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, published first in 1846, and the third and revised edition in 1876, and Dr. George Gervinus's extensive *Commentary*. Both of these are accessible in excellent translations, and are to be found in all public libraries. Dr. Ulrici gives a compendious historic outline of the life and times of the dramatist and of his predecessors and contemporaries, a careful review of the plays, and an examination of the evidence as to the order in which they were written as far as it was then known. His work is therefore at once historic and æsthetic criticism. In the latter he seeks for what the Germans, following Hegel, call the 'central idea' of the play, an abstraction which the critic sometimes finds in the work of art and assumes to be the conscious aim of the artist. As far as it refers to organic life, to harmony of parts, and to unity of the total impression, the phrase 'central idea' represents a sound

critical conception, as it usually does with Ulrici. But when we read that the central idea of *Othello* is the danger of marriage between persons of different races, or of *Romeo and Juliet*, the inadvisability of love not sanctioned by parental authority, we feel that a subjective impression is usurping the authority of general truth. Dr. Ulrici is far too able a critic to fall into such extreme subjection to theory ; but we object to his continual use of the word ‘intention’ applied to the motive of the dramatist in writing the play or in introducing certain features. Thus, we read of the union of the Lear and Gloster stories :—

The Poet *wishes to show us* that the moral corruption is not only a single case, but that it has affected the noblest families, the representatives of all the others.

The development of the leading thought, the fundamental conception upon which the inner organic unity of the drama [*Lear*] is based, is all the more clear and perfect. . . . The poet *wishes to give us* a vivid picture of how the domestic circle — the chief and firmest bond of human society, morality, and happiness — snaps asunder and becomes a succession of misfortunes and miseries, if its foundation, purity of heart and free, unconditional love, is eaten away and undermined in the heads of the family themselves by tragic contradiction in its inner nature, as in Lear, or by frivolity and weakness of character, as in Gloster. . . .

The tragedy [*Macbeth*] is evidently intended to represent the deep fall of human greatness . . . it is *intended to show us* how Macbeth’s heroic greatness is unavoidably ruined by want of moral strength. . . .

The *purpose of the piece* [*Hamlet*] is to show how the self-made thoughts, hopes, and intentions of man miss their mark, not only on account of their own short-sightedness, but that, by internal necessity, their unfounded suppositions are thwarted and disturbed by the equally baseless empire of chance. . . . *It was intended* that the spectator should

be overwhelmed, stupefied, and bewildered by it, and that he should himself thus become directly aware of similar weaknesses and uncertainty in himself.

Extracts might be multiplied on this point; and if by 'intention' is meant conscious purpose on the author's part before sitting down to elaborate a play, or even in the course of the writing, the fact that Shakespeare frequently rewrote a play, sometimes heightening the ethical tone as in the case of *Hamlet*, would negative the theory of a preconceived moral plan. An artist gets his material from a myth or old story, or from life around him. The form grows in his mind under a process of incubation, and consistency requires that there be a central idea of unity to which the tone conforms, and truth requires that there be a parallelism to the moral law if the play is to have any significance and reality. In *Love's Labour's Lost* very likely Shakespeare intended to make fun of the intellectual requisites of his day, as Dickens intended to satirize a certain type of boys' school in *Nicholas Nickleby*; and there may be works of a higher grade in which the author has written around a 'central idea' consciously kept in mind; but no didactic impulse formed the great tragedies. They are morally instructive simply because they are on the heroic, ideal plane; they build up in us a counterpart of the mood in which they were conceived. The word 'intention' is applicable to creations of a much inferior order. However, it may be that Dr. Ulrici used the word with reference to unconscious intention, the deeper sort,—volition which governs the artist in giving body and form to a general conception, and this, indeed, is his individual personality, his genius.

Dr. Ulrici ranks the historical plays very highly, and his admiration for them is so great that he con-

siders the three parts of *Henry VI* as belonging to an integral whole and as undoubtedly Shakespearean in conception. In this modern criticism, less enthusiastic and more scientific than his, does not follow him. 'The eight historical plays,' he says, 'which embrace one of the most important centuries of English history, when taken collectively form such a full, grand, and artistic picture that I know of nothing in the whole domain of dramatic poetry that can be compared to it.' With Hegel, he regards history as a great process, a sublime procession of humanity moving under hidden but comprehensible forces — comprehensible that is to the mind of genius — to a definite end. The nation is a sacred organism, having a conscience and a moral individuality. In representing history on the artistic plane, accuracy in depicting events is irrational compared to faithfulness in presenting 'the idea.' He accordingly defends Shakespeare's anachronisms and inaccuracies, not because he followed his authorities, but because they are of not the slightest consequence compared to his faithfulness in presenting the national character and harmonizing the elements of the national genius. In this it is difficult not to agree with him, nor does the flavor of mysticism, so abhorrent to the twentieth century, weaken the force of his words for those who, he says, 'have any appreciation of that higher beauty, which alone raises art above the low apeing of common reality.'

He says of *Twelfth Night*: 'It is not merely the experiencing of such a life, the very beholding it produces that quality, *that inward contentment at which we are all aiming.*' This is certainly an excellent statement of the true function of comic art; it should produce satisfaction as well as amusement. There is critical acumen in his remark that Richard III's conduct 'pro-

ceeds not only from his demoniacal desire to give forcible evidence of his power over mankind, it proceeds likewise from the demoniacal *pleasure* he finds in proving it.'

Of Shakespeare's verse he says admirably :—

His language has a peculiar internal restlessness, as if a sappy, over-ripe life were palpitating in it, as if it were swelling with hidden springs, seeking at every moment to burst their bounds ; it is only on rare occasions — but still too frequently — that this surging and swelling degenerates into a bombastic, high-flown, and inflated style. This throbbing is in fact not the soft round undulating line of beauty ; the rhythm of the Shakespearian diction resembles the short, pointed breakers of the sea on precipitous coasts, when the inrolling wave meets the one rebounding from the shore. Hence it never falls into effeminateness and sentimentality, its expression of tenderness and grace has something piquant . . . it is invariably in the highest degree animated, pregnant, and appropriate . . . for it receives its substance from a productive imagination which works in it, and which not only names and describes the object but also provides it with life and animation.

His chapter on 'Shakespeare's Modes of Characterization' is an excellent piece of philosophical criticism, showing some traces of the influence of Coleridge, and as valuable now as it was when first written.

Dr. Gervinus is inferior to Dr. Ulrici because he lacks enthusiasm and insight. In his ponderous commentary he shows great industry in bringing together all that was known at the time of the plays on the historical side, and his commentary — largely a restatement of the plots — is readable, though not illuminating. His analyses of the characters are commonplace, and no one need fear finding sentences not easily comprehens-

ible. He follows the current views, or steers a decorous middle course between them. He is one of those painstaking persons whose usefulness lies in want of originality. In consequence he does not represent so much in the development of Shakespearean criticism as Coleridge, Schlegel, or Ulrici, not to speak of lesser men. His lack of appreciation of humor leads him into a singular error in speaking of Hotspur :—

In repose and left to himself he is pliable and yielding like a lamb in his true unsuspicious nature. In private with Glendower he *allows him for nine hours to entertain him with the devils' names, although it disgusts him.*

This is based on Hotspur's petulant exaggeration :—

I tell you what :

He held me last night — at *least nine hours*  
In reckoning up the several devils' names  
That were his lackeys : I cried 'hum' and 'well; go to,'  
But mark'd him not a word. O, he is as tedious  
As a tired horse, a railing wife.

Dr. Gervinus is guilty of one or two other misapprehensions of the kind, which though not serious in themselves betray a mind to which much of Shakespeare must remain a sealed book. Commenting on the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, he writes :—

The plot is unravelled, at length, by a romantic meeting of all, in a conclusion which appears to all critics sudden, abrupt, and inartistic. It is undeniable that here the form of the plot is carelessly treated. We must, however, be cautious not to criticise rashly. For in a pathological point of view the catastrophe has been attacked just where it is most to be defended. It is, namely, essentially brought about by the offer of Valentine to sacrifice his beloved one to his faithless friend. This, Charles Lamb and many others considered as an unjustifiable act of heroic friendship. But this trait essen-

tially belongs to Valentine's character. That it was not unintentionally introduced may also be traced from the mere parallelism observed throughout the composition. For Julia also is exhibited to us in the same aspect of resignation and self-renunciation springing from pure good-nature which in her as in Valentine stands out in contrast to the self-love of Proteus.

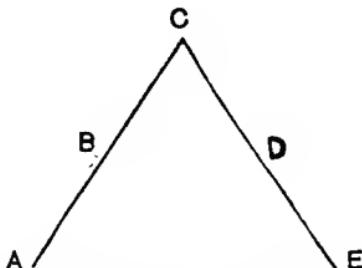
Even if we admit that Valentine's offer to give up his lady-love to his false friend is an exaggerated representation of chivalric friendship, the idea that 'parallelism' requires a self-sacrificing young man to balance a self-sacrificing young woman will hardly be accepted. If it were, there should be a selfish, false young woman to balance the selfish, false young man. There should be two waiting-maids instead of one only, and Speed should have a dog, or at least a cat, to offset Launce's dog. But parallelism is dear to the mechanical critic. It is strange, however, that none of the critics, though agreeing that the last scene of the play is unnatural — indeed impossible — have never noticed its grave dramatic fault. The high-spirited, aristocratic Sylvia is kept on the stage twenty minutes in the crisis of her life, and never says a word while her lover discards and resumes her. No woman would be content with by-play under such circumstances, nor would the great dramatist have forced her to keep silent. There is a lack of 'parallelism' here between Sylvia's quiescence and the natural conduct of a rejected girl.

In 1863 Gustav Freytag, the celebrated German novelist, author of *Soll und Haben* (Debit and Credit), published *Technique of the Drama*. Although a large part of his illustrations is taken from the Greek and German drama, Shakespearean criticism has from that time been turned more or less to the important question

of 'dramatic construction.' The author first defines the 'Idea of the Drama' as the central important event as it takes form in the poet's mind, 'toward which independent inventions are directed like rays.' He illustrates this by relating how Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* was suggested by a short notice in a newspaper of the suicide of two lovers. This was the germ from which the 'fancy of the poet, aroused by sympathy, fashioned the character of an ardent and passionate youth and of an innocent and susceptible maiden.' It is, however, from the remodeling and developing that the 'occurrence in real life becomes a dramatic idea.' The idea is not the germ merely—otherwise there might be any number of plays with the same idea; it is the germ developing in the mind of the writer, it is the germ colored by the personal imagination, in taking form. This notion, though abstract, is comprehensible, and affords a base for considering the analysis of a serious play or tragedy.

Freytag then considers the 'dramatic action' and the 'construction of the drama.' He considers that a tragedy is normally divided into five parts: First, the introduction, in which the characters are presented and their antecedents and surroundings are so far discussed that we may without difficulty comprehend the succeeding action. The tone is given,—the artistic note of the whole, as in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*; and the 'rising force,' or the impulses, the juxtaposition of characters, the antecedent or existing circumstances which are likely to lead to a conflict, is indicated. Thus we see early in the first act that Othello is frank and Iago subtle and envious, that Macbeth is ambitious and fundamentally unmoral, and are prepared for the conflict that is to follow. Secondly, comes the 'rising action,' when the rising force is gathering strength and the hero is apparently successful, or at least the rising force is

effective. Thirdly, the 'climax,' when the rising force has gone as far as it may. Fourthly, the 'falling action,' when an opposing force gathers strength and combats the force (moral or social) which constituted the rising action. Fifthly, comes the 'catastrophe,' involving the death of the hero and perhaps of several minor characters. These final divisions correspond roughly to the five acts, and the fact that they are the articulations of a tragic action is the reason for the division of a tragedy into five acts. Freytag's illustration of the movement of a tragedy by inclined lines meeting in an angle representing the climax is so well known as hardly to be worth reproducing.



A represents the introduction ; B, the rising action ; C, the climax, which introduces the counter force ; D, the counter or falling action ; and E, the catastrophe.

*Macbeth* is a good illustration of the scheme. The introduction gives the tone, the witches and the blasted heath suggest wickedness and destructiveness. All the characters are introduced and their relations explained, and the impelling force, the ambition of the guilty pair, is brought before the mind, in the first four scenes. Then comes the rising action with slight reactions,—in Freytag's scheme the rising and falling actions are regarded as liable to interruptions and setbacks,—culminating in the murder and discovery in act II. The climax is the banquet scene in the centre of act III, when Macbeth and his wife have attained the royal dignity. The

retributive force is suggested. It is remorse in Macbeth's mind and the reaction of the social order against tyranny, suggested in the last scene of the act. In the fourth act the representatives of the counter force organize for active resistance. In the fifth act comes the final conflict and the catastrophe. Here everything conforms to Freytag's scheme, and the movements of the action agree very nearly with the divisions into acts. But when we endeavor to apply it to *Hamlet* or *Othello* we at once meet difficulties. In *Macbeth* the two impelling forces are quite evident,—personal ambition and the instinct of society towards security under the law; but what are they in *Hamlet*? The answer depends on the conception we form of a character not entirely comprehensible. We might say in this case and in that of *Othello* that the forces were the good and the evil in man, but such a conception is too general to form the groundwork of an analysis of a drama. In each of these plays the catastrophe is evident, but the climax is less so. *Othello* is at the height of happiness when he lands in Cyprus early in the second act, but up to this point all is introduction. *Hamlet*, representing the good, the moral force in man, is so weakened by melancholy as to be ineffective; the triumph of the bad man is antecedent to the play, when Claudius is elected to the throne. The climax in *Hamlet* may be taken to be the play-scene when the prince establishes the guilt of his uncle, at least in his own mind and that of Horatio. But it is followed by no reversal of the action.

Nevertheless Freytag's scheme is of great value, even if it should only emphasize the fact that there is such a thing as definite construction in a tragedy, and that dramatic action is progressive to a definite end under certain very general laws. It is not invertebrate. Perhaps if we modified the conception that a tragedy

is a conflict between moral forces (originally Hegel's idea), and took the ground that it was a conflict between men,—representing, if you wish to be metaphysical, certain moral forces,—the scheme would be applicable to all of Shakespeare's tragedies. Hamlet contends with the King with varying fortunes; Othello with Iago; Macbeth with Malcolm; and Lear with his daughters, till the final catastrophe. All of these are, it is true, representative characters. But it is because they are characters, not because they stand for good or evil, that we are interested in them. Lincoln was a just man and slavery was unjust, therefore he did not sympathize with it; but we love him for himself, not solely because he represented a moral cause. Shakespeare's four heroes are very interesting men, and all but Macbeth are lovable. They are engaged in a conflict with external circumstances and with other men. This involves, too, a conflict in their own minds, which they disclose with wonderful power of language, revealing thereby the richness and depth of their nature and their affinity to the human race. We therefore become much interested in their conflict with other men; for by reason of hereditary instinct, there is nothing that excites men and women so much as a fight, especially a serious one. The Romans wanted the real thing in the arena; we are forced to be contented with a mimetic representation. But are we not quite warranted in calling a tragic plot a conflict *between men*?

Freytag says, as an explanation of the pleasure we take in witnessing a tragedy:—

The ultimate ground of every great effect of the drama lies not in the necessity of the spectator to receive impressions, but in his never ceasing and irresistible desire to create and fashion. The dramatist compels the listener to repeat his creations. The whole world of characters, of sorrow, and of des-

tiny, the hearer must make alive in himself. While he is receiving with a high degree of suspense, he is in most powerful, most rapid creative activity. An ardor and beautifying cheerfulness like that which the poet himself has felt, fills the hearer, who repeats the poet's efforts ; therefore the pain with the feeling of pleasure ; therefore the exaltation which outlasts the conclusion of the piece. And this stimulation of the creative imagination is penetrated with still a milder light ; for closely connected with it is an exalting sense of eternal reason in the severest fates and sorrows of men. The spectator feels and recognizes that the divinity which guides his life, even when it shatters the individual human being, acts in a benevolent fellowship with the human race ; and he feels himself creatively exalted as united with and in accord with the great world-guiding power.

Any one who feels a sympathetic creative thrill on witnessing the production of a great tragedy must be, like Herr Freytag himself, more or less of an artist. But we doubt if even he could feel any creative exaltation of spirit on witnessing *Ghosts* or the *Master Builder* or the *Philanderers*, much as he might have admired the technical skill of all. In fact, after reading or witnessing one of Shaw's or Ibsen's dramas, instead of feeling any 'ardor and beautifying cheerfulness,' we feel ashamed of the human race,— it is built on so small a pattern and furnished with so slight internal strength of resistance. The world seems essentially futile and hopeless and ridiculous. The 'divinity which guides our lives' is not 'acting in benevolent fellowship with the human race' ; it is withdrawn in profound indifference. There does come a feeling of exaltation to the plainest spectator after seeing one of the great tragedies. He is proud to feel that he is cousin to Hamlet or Othello, to know that our human nature can produce such noble souls, amorous of the good. Even the gigan-

tic vigor of Macbeth is refreshing to one who has dwelt long with the petty figures of the modern stage, for he, too, 'greatly lived.' Herr Freytag died before the apotheosis of the common and the unclean, and was recalling the feelings with which he first witnessed the plays of Lessing and Shakespeare and Schiller and Goethe.

Freytag's scheme is carried out with great minuteness and numberless subdivisions. He applies to acts and even to important scenes his ideas of the introduction, the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the catastrophe. If he sometimes seems fanciful, he never fails to enforce the idea that dramatic construction is a technical art subject to principles, entirely different from those of narration or lyric abandon. His book was not translated into English till 1898, but his view-point was taken here and there by English critics much earlier. A very admirable little book, *The Drama and its Technique*, by Dr. Elizabeth Woodbridge, in the same year, follows Freytag's method in the main, avoiding much of his fancifulness and diffuseness, and adding an element of common sense and definite point that makes it more satisfactory than the German treatise. It adds, too, a discussion of that very difficult subject, the art of comedy, and contains many admirable suggestions for practical criticism of dramatic art as far as it may be distinguished from dramatic substance. But it must be remembered that technical construction is only the framework into which the dramatic elements of characterization, wit, dialogue, and poetry are to be fitted, and that it is quite possible to overestimate its relative importance. The well-articulated scheme must contain something of a higher value than itself, and of a less mechanical nature.

The subject of Dramatic Construction has been

treated later by Mr. Richard G. Moulton in an interesting but quite unconvincing book. There is a method of pseudo-criticism which assumes that because science classifies ants and spiders under many technical tribenames, literary products can be profitably treated in the same general manner. Thus Mr. Moulton makes minute and fanciful divisions and subdivisions of the plays, even of the scenes, and invents a corresponding terminology: ‘Nemesis Action,’ ‘Oracular Action,’ ‘Problem Action,’ ‘Enveloping Action,’ and the like. If these terms correspond to any real differences, they do not mark the qualities which give life and distinction to a drama. The qualities of form which the *Merchant of Venice* has in common with *Midsummer Night's Dream*, if treated in the ‘inductive method,’ are of little more importance from the standpoint of literary criticism than the shape of the type or the material of the paper. The fact that a romantic drama is not the proper subject of this kind of scientific analysis is the essence of its excellence. To science thus interpreted, a play is a play regardless of its quality, and Mr. Moulton’s critique of the *Merchant of Venice* might be applied with equal force to one of the crude and childish comedies of Dekker. As far as the methods of science imply sincerity, industry, and common sense combined with imaginative realization of the nature of the subject-matter, they are applicable to the analysis of literary products. In this sense they govern the analysis of the leading modern critics, Bradley, Lee, and Lounsbury, and the result is a substantial refinement of appreciation. But to take the form and not the real method of science, and simply build an elaborate structure of classifications with groups and sub-groups, gives a suspicious appearance of thoroughness without touching the necessary question of the play or illuminating with the faintest

spark its essential nature. In reality it is as unfruitful and arbitrary as the old notion that construction must observe the three unities, and is based on the same mistaken point of view, though appealing to a more modern authority.

The best consideration of the important question of dramatic construction is to be found in the second chapter of Dr. Bradley's book on the four tragedies. He considers each separately, and does not hesitate to point out faults of construction, and how, in some instances, the faults are more than compensated for by special excellences which the very faults make possible. It is greatly to be desired that he, or some one of equal philosophical grasp and power of expression, analyze the construction of the comedies, taking up each one separately, showing how an effect is created by the succession and variety of the scenes, how laughter and amusement are blended, and quiet suggestions of pathos heighten the effect of both; how far in the unrolling of the story the author relied on the fact that his audience were familiar with its general outlines — in a word, how the total effect is produced by harmonious but sometimes apparently discordant parts. He would not hesitate to point out that Shakespeare, though sometimes showing great skill in construction, frequently depends more on wit, poetry, and character interest to hold his audience than on plot interest; and that occasionally the latter part of his plot forgets the beginning. He would explain, if it be explainable, how he mingles the elements and produces a total effect which has the charm of one of nature's best days. That would be the result of the true scientific method.

Shakespeare has become almost as important in German as in English literature. Some twelve translations have been made, the most important being the revision

of Schlegel by the German Shakespeare Society, begun on the three hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth. The yearly publications of this society are of the greatest value. The independent works connected with the subject form a large library. The edition of Delius—giving the English text and German notes—is a monument of painstaking scholarship. All this has reacted on English criticism, by increasing the pride Englishmen take in their national poet and by presenting them with a body of criticism in which the plays are treated on the principles of æsthetic art and the historical *milieu* is viewed from a standpoint different from that taken by a native. Among some of the lesser German critics there has been from time to time a disposition to assume that their nation discovered Shakespeare, and that, as the representatives of pure Teutonism, they could best comprehend and interpret the great poet of the race; but, as is usually the case, the leading scholars of both nations estimate the labors of all at their proper value. A true conception of Shakespeare's art implies a width and catholicity of mind incompatible with petty jealousy. Thus, one very narrow-minded but broadly arrogant person, Professor Lemcke, says:—

Let us for once lay aside our proverbial modesty, and openly declare that it is not the affinity of race, nor the indications in his poetry of a German spirit, which have brought us so close to Shakespeare, but it is that God-given power vouchsafed to us Germans before all other nations, by the grace of which we are enabled to recognize true genius, of whatsoever nation, better than other nations, oftentimes better than its own, and better to enjoy and to appropriate its gifts. We understand and love Shakespeare by virtue of that same German insight which has helped the Italians to understand their Dante. . . . We comprehend and love Shakespeare because we are undeniably a 'Nation of Think-

ers,' as other nations have before now so often been obliged with ill-concealed vexation to acknowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Schlegel, as a nineteenth-century romanticist, shows less respect for the commentators of the eighteenth century than does Ulrici, but he bears emphatic testimony to the love the general gender bore their national poet, for he writes: —

With respect to the criticisms which are merely of a philosophical nature I am frequently compelled to differ from the commentators (Steevens, Malone, Capell); and when they consider him merely a poet, endeavor to pronounce upon his views and to enter into his merits, I must separate myself from them entirely. I have hardly ever found either truth or profundity in their observations; and these critics seem to me to be but stammering interpreters of the general and almost idolatrous admiration of his countrymen.

On the other hand, Professor Mommsen, whose edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, says Dr. Furness, 'will stand as long as Shakespeare is studied, a monument of critical sagacity, patient toil, and microscopic investigation of the text,' writes in the spirit of scholarly brotherhood: —

It is assuredly a valuable work to epitomize intelligently the great English commentators of Shakespeare; here and there by a collation of the old copies we may happily settle some doubtful reading, but it is a perilous game not to confess under all circumstances, frankly and modestly, that we are wholly dependent on the English; verily we should suffer wreck if with the one hand we accept from them all the means by which we live and breathe, and with the other, by way of thanks, fling scorn and contempt upon their names.

In the same spirit Ulrici says: —

It [the translation, some 1000 pages] will worthily, as far

<sup>1</sup> Furness's *Romeo and Juliet*, Preface, p. xiv.

as form is concerned, fulfil its object in being a small contribution to the great wealth of Shakespearean literature in England. It would give me great pleasure and satisfaction, were I to find that the substance of my book itself met with the sympathy and approval of the English public, more especially of English Shakespearean scholars, for whose judgment I entertain the highest esteem and regard. In pure profound veneration for the great poet, I venture to think that my work is not inferior to that of any English writer on the subject.

In view of such modest and manly words from the great men, the irritation of some English and American commentators — notably Mr. Richard Grant White and Mr. Swinburne — with the Germans, seems hardly worth while.

#### SHAKESPEARE IN FRANCE

The genius of the English and French nations is so radically different, that it would seem unlikely that French critics would comprehend Shakespearean art. An adequate translation of the plays, one which should give something of the form and spirit and produce an impression somewhat akin to that of the original, is obviously impossible in French except as applied to the dignified passages of the historical plays. But the intelligence of Frenchmen is so keen, and the spirit of French literary men is so catholic, that they are able to put themselves imaginatively into the spiritual mood of other races. They love art so fundamentally that they can recognize it in the most alien form. Therefore, in spite of their Latin dislike of the unrestrained and the unconventional in expression, and of the fact that the masterpieces of their dramatic period are as different from the Shakespearean tragedies as can well be imagined, and in spite of the fact that their master of the eighteenth century, Voltaire, after confessing his aston-

ishment and wonder at the effect produced on him by the representation of the plays in London, went afterwards to the extreme of ill-natured ridicule, and in spite of the linguistic and spiritual gulf that separates a French classic from an Elizabethan masterpiece, French critics have come to admire Shakespeare intelligently, though their admiration is still tintured with astonishment.

The changing attitude of Voltaire, in whom an astonishingly petty jealousy was combined with reverence for conventional rules of construction and an underlying perception of Shakespeare's literary power, is fully set forth by Professor Lounsbury in the second volume of *Shakespearean Wars*, a book which is profoundly interesting not merely as history, but as a study of human nature. We will cite only Voltaire's well-known criticism on *Hamlet*, made at a period when he was especially unreasonable:—

Far be it from me to justify everything in that tragedy; it is a vulgar and barbarous drama which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France or Italy. Hamlet becomes crazy in the second act, and his mistress becomes crazy in the third; the prince slays her father under the pretence of killing a rat, and the heroine throws herself into the river; a grave is dug on the stage, and the gravediggers talk quodlibets worthy of themselves, while holding skulls in their hands. Hamlet responds to their nasty vulgarities in silliness no less disgusting. In the mean time another of the actors conquers Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and his father-in-law carouse on the stage; songs are sung at table; there is quarreling, fighting, killing — one would imagine this to be the work of a drunken savage. But amidst all these vulgar irregularities, which to this day make the English drama so absurd and so barbarous, there are to be found in *Hamlet*, by a bizarrie still greater, some sublime passages worthy of the greatest genius. It seems as though nature had mingled in the brain

of Shakespeare the greatest conceivable strength and grandeur with whatsoever witless vulgarity can devise that is lowest and most detestable.

As an offset to this we will quote the words of M. Anatole France, one hundred and fifty years later.<sup>1</sup> They atone for the foolish words of Voltaire, indeed, leave Shakespeare in debt to the French nation. M. France has been to the play and seen *Hamlet*. He imagines that he and the Danish Prince go home together, and he talks to the figment of Shakespeare's brain as if he were a real person. He says:—

First he must apologize to Hamlet for the audience, some part of which, as he may have noticed, seemed a trifle inattentive and light. Hamlet must not lay this to heart. 'It was an audience of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen,' he should understand. 'You were not in evening dress, you had no amorous intrigue in the world of high finance, and you wore no flower in your buttonhole. For that reason the ladies coughed a little in their boxes while eating iced fruits. Your adventures could not interest them. *They were not worldly adventures, they were only human adventures.* Besides, you force people to think, and that is an offense which will never be pardoned to you here.'

Still there were a few among the spectators who were profoundly moved, a few by whom the melancholy Dane is preferred before all other beings ever created by the breath of genius. The critic himself by a happy chance sat near one such, M. Auguste Dorchain. 'He understands you, my prince, as he understands Racine, because he is a poet.'

And then, after a little, he concludes by confiding to Hamlet what a mystery and contradiction the world has found him, though he is the universal man, the man of all times and all countries, though he is exactly like the rest of us, *a man living in the midst of universal evil.* It is just because he is like the rest of us, indeed, that we find his character a

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mr. Bradford Torrey in the *Atlantic*, March, 1906.

thing so impossible to grasp. It is because we do not understand ourselves that we do not understand him. His very inconsistencies and contradictions are the sign of his profound humanity. ‘ You are prompt and slow, audacious and timid, benevolent and cruel ; you believe and you doubt ; you are wise, and above everything else you are insane. In a word, you live. Who of us does not resemble you in something ? Who of us thinks without contradiction and acts without inconsistency ? Who of us is not insane ? Who of us but says to you with a mixture of pity, of sympathy, of admiration, and of horror, “ Good-night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.” ’

That may not be systematic criticism, but it is a very beautiful and adequate appreciation. French literary criticism has a sympathetic quality, so that in the hands of the brilliant men, like Scherer, Jusserand, Taine, or Sainte-Beuve, it becomes literature itself. It has had a great influence on Englishmen, and has developed greatly since the eighteenth century, when Boileau was dictator. The criticism of Shakespeare in France has been of less importance than the indirect influence of the French writers. His form was so different from the accepted dramatic form that when his plays were translated and adapted for the stage they were mutilated. Victor Hugo, as the romantic champion of the nineteenth century, was an extravagant admirer of the English poet, and his son François produced an excellent translation of the plays. At present no foreigners understand Shakespeare, both from the dramatic and the philosophic side, better than the leading French scholars, and their influence has contributed to form the tone of good sense, moderation, and reference to human nature as it really is which marks the writings of the latest critics in England and America. German idealism and French artistic comprehension, the one

fixing its attention on abstract beauty and the other on the beautiful things, have combined to justify, perhaps to heighten, our admiration of Shakespeare.

The sparkling chapter in Taine's *English Literature* on Shakespeare is the French criticism best known to English readers. Shakespeare, he says, is 'one whom we have perceived before us through all the vistas of the Renaissance, like some vast oak to whom all forest ways converge.' 'No writer, not even Molière, has penetrated so far beneath the semblance of common sense and logic in which the human machine is inclosed in order to grasp the brute powers which constitute its substance and its mainspring.' But the Frenchman's predilection for form governs M. Taine, in spite of his admiration of the poetry. Hamlet's language to his mother he calls 'the style of phrensy'; we should say that it is the language of profound emotion. In Shakespeare, he declares, 'there is no preparation, no adaptation, no development, no care to make himself understood.' Shakespeare flies, we creep. 'A poet,' he insists, 'does not copy at random the manners which surround him' —

If he is a logician, an actor or moralist as Racine, he will only present noble manners, he will avoid low characters; he will have a horror of valets and plebs; he will observe the greatest decorum in respect of the strongest outbreaks of passion; he will blot out precise details, special traits, and will raise tragedy into a serene and sublime region, where his abstract personages, after an exchange of eloquent harangues and noble dissertations, will kill each other becomingly and as though they were merely concluding a ceremony. . . . Shakespeare's master faculty is an impassioned imagination, *freed from the fetters of reason and morality*. He does not dream of ennobling but of copying human life.

By 'morality' M. Taine evidently means propriety,

that which is the *mos*, or custom. He can make nothing of Hamlet except that he has a 'heated imagination,' is 'an artist whom evil chance has made a prince.' The Shakespearean drama, he says, 'reproduces promiscuously ugliness, basenesses, horrors, unclean details, profligate and ferocious manners, the whole reality of life just as it is when it is unrestrained by decorum, common sense, and duty.' All these animadversions on Shakespeare's art are, however, quite compatible in the Frenchman's mind with admiration of his fecundity and his power, nor does he fail to do justice to the delicate beauty of some of his creations, like the fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the woodland scenes of *As You Like It*, and Prospero's enchanted island. He is at once broad and narrow, and a trifle bewildered by his own enthusiasm, and is, on the whole, more successful in revealing the mind and method of a brilliant Frenchman than in criticising an English poet.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MIDDLE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

MRS. JAMESON (1794-1860)

THE romanticists beginning with Coleridge were the first to appreciate fully the delicate psychical qualities of Shakespeare's female characters. This is but natural, for the Shakespearean conception of love as something divine and unaccountable and yet permanent is akin to the enthusiasm of the romantic spirit. Mrs. Jameson's *Characteristics of Shakespeare's Women* appeared in 1832, and her views are therefore not novel. But the agreeable style in which it was written gave the book considerable influence with the reading public, and entitles it to rank high among the minor documents of criticism, though it is not marked by subtle discriminations or a very profound knowledge of human nature or thorough comprehension of dramatic art. The classification of the heroines into 'Characters of Intellect, Characters of Passion and Imagination, Characters of the Affections, and Historical Characters,' reminds one of the eighteenth century, and is not in the least scientific, since it leaves Cleopatra out of the list of the characters of passion and puts her with the Roman matrons, Octavia and Volumnia, among the historical characters, and separates Rosalind and Viola and joins Rosalind and Isabella as 'characters of intellect.' 'Portia, Isabella, Beatrice, and Rosalind,' she declares, 'may be classed together, because when compared with the others they are all distinguished by mental superiority.' She gives no citations in support of this view, and we are very sure that their superiority over Viola, Imogen, and Helena

in intellectual acuteness or activity is not at once manifest. It may be that Portia, Beatrice, and Rosalind excel the others in wit, but Isabella certainly does not. In putting Portia and Isabella in the same class, because both are eloquent, though in very different ways, Mrs. Jameson confounds two entirely different types of women. Portia is in love, Isabella is not, and, as far as we can see, is incapable of a generous affection. She is dignified, but cold, reserved, and self-centred. Indeed, there is not a single fine character in *Measure for Measure*, if we except Escalus. The duke is a crotchety, unpractical person, and shirks his duties, though he philosophizes admirably on death. Isabella talks beautifully about mercy, but with none of the natural fervor that inspires Portia's eloquence on the same subject. Isabella is a very disagreeable person, and her righteous horror at her brother's infamous suggestion is tinged with no compassion for the poor wretch sentenced to die. She is 'enskied and sainted' as a religious *dévote*, not as a woman.

Mrs. Jameson does full justice to Rosalind's irresistible vivacity and pleasantry. Rosalind is so blithe and so full of the life of youth that every one must feel her natural charm. But the merry, high-spirited girl once discloses the depth of her nature. Dressed as a boy, she proposed and went through a travesty of the marriage ceremony with Orlando. Scarcely has she pronounced in jest the solemn words: 'I do take thee, Orlando, for my husband,' before a wave of seriousness passes over her merry spirit, and a chill shadow of the possibilities of the future saddens her as she realizes what love is to her and how frightful it would be if her lover should grow indifferent.

*Ros.* Now, tell me how long you would have her after you have possessed her.

*Orl.* For ever and a day.

*Ros.* Say 'a day' without the 'ever.' No, no, Orlando; men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.

Shakespeare sketches his characters in broad, firm lines; then the lights and shades are put in by little touches like the above, so that they are at once types and individuals. The slight differentiae escape us unless we imagine the person vividly or see it portrayed by an actor who realizes the part.

Of Juliet, the heroine of love, at once passionate and pure, Mrs. Jameson says: 'Such is the simplicity, the truth, and the loveliness of Juliet's character, that we are not at once aware of its complexity, its depth, and its variety. All Shakespeare's women either love or have loved, but Juliet is love itself — nearly the whole of the dialogue appropriated to Juliet is one rich stream of imagery.' It is difficult to see how the 'simplicity' of Juliet's character can hide its 'complexity.' Undoubtedly Juliet is capable of great resolution, and so is her lover, but in each case it is under the influence of an exalted passion that they are courageous. Juliet's language in the passages Mrs. Jameson has in mind is simply a lyrical expression of love, due to the heightening and quickening of the imagination all young people experience when first dominated by the most powerful of emotions. The theme of the tragedy goes no deeper than true love crossed by the stars. It is general, and the hero and heroine are more typical than individual, and so absorbed in their passion as to display little else. The play is a beautiful poem, but as a study of human nature and of the world it is not in the same class as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

To Viola Mrs. Jameson hardly does justice, though

she does say that she ‘has a touch of sentiment more profound and heart-stirring’ than Perdita. The truth is, Viola has the most poetic soul of any of the Shakespearean women. Portia says beautiful things, always tinged with intellectuality. Juliet ascends under the excitement of love or fear to the heights of imaginative expression, but neither of them could have said on hearing a strain of music,—

It gives a very echo to the seat  
Where Love is throned.

Viola has a nature more akin to music than either of them, and, though she lacks the high spirits of Rosalind, she is hardly less witty. Besides, she is not conscious of being beloved, as Rosalind is, and is therefore more reflective.

All of Shakespeare’s young women are distinctly feminine, and but one has a living mother, so that he missed the full portrayal of one of the most beautiful relations, one from which he could readily have drawn charming dramatic effects. Beatrice is the imperial, aristocratic young woman, witty and beautiful, but in her wit there is no trace of imagination. Her standard of honor is high, so that, though she undoubtedly loves Benedick, and probably was in love with him before the play opens, she is ready to have him fight Claudio in the first hour of their engagement. Nevertheless, she will make a devoted wife, and he will have ‘fire-new jests to his breakfast every day.’ Mrs. Jameson seems to have some doubt as to their matrimonial felicity, which only shows that one brilliant woman never likes another. The vengeful ‘*kill Claudio*’ of Beatrice to Benedick has a startling effect, and passes beyond the comic, though it comes in the first love passage, but Beatrice is clearly right, as her lover sees in a moment.

In common with the critics of the period, Mrs. Jameson thinks that in Ophelia Shakespeare paints the lily :—

Ophelia — poor Ophelia. O far too soft, too good, too fair to be cast among the briars of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life ! What shall be said of her ? for eloquence is mute before her ! Like a strain of sad, sweet music which comes floating by us on the wings of night and silence, and which we rather feel than hear — like the exhalation of the violet dying even upon the sense it charms — like the snow flake dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth — like the light surf severed from the billow, which a breath disperses — such is the character of Ophelia : so exquisitely delicate it seems as if a touch would profane it ; so sanctified in our thoughts by the last and worst of human woes, that we scarcely dare to consider it too deeply. The love of Ophelia which she never once confesses is like a secret which we have stolen from her, and which ought to die upon our hearts as upon her own.

The above criticism illustrates several faults of the romantic school. The style is unduly impassioned, and the feelings are allowed to get the better of the understanding. Life is viewed from the emotional standpoint solely. The facts of the case are disregarded. The feeling between Ophelia and Hamlet was not the powerful attraction of mated souls, for she did not understand Hamlet in the least, and love not only ‘lends a precious seeing to the eye,’ it imparts a divining power to the heart. Ophelia obeys her father with the utmost docility, which fact alone shows that her love was not very deep. After the nunnery scene, where Hamlet speaks to her with cruel harshness, she accepts the theory that he is insane, but her soliloquy, ‘Oh, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown,’ is quiet in its tone of regret, and its smooth, equable rhythm betrays no deep

feeling. Mrs. Jameson says also that ‘the love of Hamlet for Ophelia is real, and is precisely the kind of love which such a man as Hamlet would feel for such a woman as Ophelia,’ — a pretty safe statement, but she qualifies it by saying that ‘he loves her with a love as intense as can belong to a nature in which there is much more of contemplation and sensibility than action or passion.’ This is the old view of Hamlet, which considers him a dreamer and a weak-willed person, and need not detain us. But Mrs. Jameson misconceives the character of Ophelia and her function in the soul-drama. The love between her and the prince is antecedent to the action. No doubt Hamlet had been attracted by her innocence and youth, for she says that he had made ‘many tenders of his affection’ to her, and Hamlet was not the man to make such tenders as ‘springes to catch woodcocks.’ When his father died and he was brought face to face with grief, it is probable that he perceived that she was essentially shallow and commonplace; for in his first soliloquy, which is uttered before she in obedience to her father had refused,

so to slander any moment leisure  
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet,

he does not refer to his love. It is impossible that any lover could say of the world : —

Fie on 't, ah fie. 'Tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed ; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely, —

unless he had found himself deceived in the woman he loved. Still he tries to see her, and her repulse no doubt added to his melancholy. In the funeral scene the pathos of the situation overcomes him, and for the moment he remembers only that he had once thought tenderly of her, and behaves with the most absurd ex-

travagance. In the nunnery scene he expresses his resentment and disappointment in the same manner, and it is a great mistake for the actor to inject an element of tenderness into the representation.

All that Mrs. Jameson says of the historical characters, especially of Queen Katharine and Constance, is excellent. Oddly enough, she puts Lady Macbeth among the historical characters. In common with all the generation who witnessed the impressive representation of Mrs. Siddons, she is more struck with the grandeur than with the wickedness of the woman, and considers her the far 'superior mind.' Macbeth is certainly her superior in imaginative ardor and in the power of putting his visionary perceptions into words. The male and female criminal are finely discriminated in the pair, and Lady Macbeth is certainly a great woman, the difference being that the evil energy is more easily roused to action in her than in him, but after it is roused it carries him further than she would have gone, because his imagination goads him on. The power of foreseeing vividly the consequences of a criminal act is an intellectual power, and its absence makes the ordinary criminal stupid. Macbeth has this, and the further power of reflecting on his crime and seeing it in its relations to society and its true nature. True, he yields to her, but that is not because he is the inferior nature, but because he loves her—she is his wife, the 'dearest partner of his greatness.'

Miranda and Perdita are lovely creations, and no one can be insensible to their charm. Shakespeare himself seems to regard them with paternal tenderness, and they are in reality children, with all the attraction of youthful promise. They are, however, but ideal sketches, not individualized enough to call out differences of interpretation. They are perfect. Imogen, too,

though a woman and a wife, is compounded of all that is admirable and noble, though with a sweetness all her own. Mrs. Jameson considers her the most perfect of Shakespeare's female characters. 'In her,' she says,—

We have all the fervor of youthful tenderness, all the romance of youthful fancy, all the enchantment of ideal grace — the bloom of beauty, the brightness of intellect, and the dignity of rank taking a peculiar hue from the conjugal character which is shed over all like a consecration and a holy charm.

These three appearing in romantic plays, where the treatment is poetic rather than dramatic, have, naturally, less complexity of nature than their sisters. They speak little prose or none, and the iridescence of poetry clothes them with its luminous haze. They exist in an enchanted land. So, indeed, do Rosalind and Viola; but Illyria and the Forest of Arden are not set so far away in the poetic world that we cannot readily journey there and find the place less strange than Perdita's sheep-shearing, or Prospero's island, or Cymbeline's Britain.

It is a mistake to imagine Desdemona, as Mrs. Jameson does, to be devoid of force of character, though her unsuspecting innocence does give the impression of weakness. Mrs. Jameson uses the expressions, 'gentleness verging on passiveness,' 'soft credulity,' 'endued with that temper which is the origin of love as of religion,' and adds:—

I know a Desdemona in real life, one in whom the absence of intellectual power is never felt as a deficiency, nor the absence of energy of will as impairing the dignity, nor the most imperturbable serenity as a want of feeling: one in whom thoughts appear mere instincts, the sentiment of rectitude supplies the principle, and virtue itself seems rather a necessary state of being than an imposed law.

No shade of sin or vanity has yet stolen over that bright innocence. . . . The impression produced is exactly that of the character of Desdemona. . . . In Desdemona we cannot but feel that the slightest manifestation of intellectual power or active will would have injured the dramatic effect. She is a victim consecrated from the first — ‘an offering without blemish.’

There is a good deal of truth in this. Desdemona does seem incapable of resentment or resistance; we naturally compare her to a ‘dove in the talons of a vulture.’ But when we examine the story we find that she had resolution enough to leave her father’s house and marry the man to whom her heart was given, although the step forfeited her position as daughter of one of the Venetian aristocracy. She overcame the race prejudice and ‘saw Othello’s visage in his mind.’ We cannot call her weakly timid because she prevaricated to her husband about the lost handkerchief, for Othello when aroused was a frightful person. Iago, evidently a man of personal courage, is alarmed when he sees what a dangerous force he has evoked, and Othello tells him:—

Give me the ocular proof;  
Or, by the worth of man’s eternal soul,  
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog  
Than answer my naked wrath.

Iago sees at once that Othello is dangerous, and that he himself can take no backward step. Desdemona is not so courageous as Juliet, who, we can well imagine, would have gone directly to the point and found out what was the matter with her husband, but she is far from a negative character. Her goodness of heart is positive, and forces her to active exertions for Cassio.

In much the same way the beauty of Cordelia’s love, which has made her the type of the relation between

father and daughter, blinds Mrs. Jameson to the defects of her character. Cordelia understands the selfishness of her sisters, and it is a noble pride which makes her disdain to enter on a contest in fulsome praise with them, but her conduct in the first act certainly verges on the bounds of willful perversity. It would have been the part of an intelligent and kind daughter to have humored the old man instead of goading him to fury by untimely opposition. Cordelia will make no terms with hypocrisy. Her proud reticence—not uncommon in young people—is a defect, though the defect of a fine nature. She loves her father and knows very well that he loves her, but she virtually insults and bitterly disappoints him in public. She displays bluntness and lack of tact and incapacity to grasp the situation. She could not have foreseen the hard cruelty which power would develop in her sisters, but she knew them selfish, and must have known that she was delivering Lear into their hands. She says to them:—

I know you what you are ;  
And, like a sister, am most loath to call  
Your faults as they are named.<sup>1</sup>

And this before they have said a word to her. She must have loved the King of France and known that he loved her, and this alone should have made her more considerate. Cordelia is an uncompromising person, and as much harm is done in this world by the good who will hold no terms with evil and will admit no half-way measures as by the wicked themselves. Cordelia is essentially good, and yet her conduct is the *fons et origo* of all her father's sufferings. Cordelia's character

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Jameson says, ‘Her *mild magnanimity* shines out in her farewell to her sisters.’ If this is magnanimity, how would Cordelia express scorn ?

is by no means all beautiful, but her love for her father is pure womanly, and makes her appear an angel of light, especially in comparison with her sisters. The father and sisters are all marked by courage and quickness of temper and dislike of any restraint. Lear and Cordelia have in addition the capacity for loving. So great is our admiration for this, and so settled our consciousness that it is a divine thing, that we rank Cordelia high among women, though any other of the Shakespearean heroines would have prevented or avoided the frightful misfortunes her willfulness entailed.

Women sometimes comprehend character instinctively without being able to justify their conclusions logically. In analyzing Cleopatra Mrs. Jameson does not comprehend and cannot justify her non-comprehension. The character is perhaps too complex and too feminine to admit of analysis. Mrs. Jameson's estimate of her as made up of 'inconsistent consistency,' a unity in 'infinite variety,' rather dodges the question, but is perhaps as near as any one comes to explaining this marvelous creation. To some of the minor characters, like Emilia, she does scant justice; others, like the Queen in *Hamlet*, she ignores. But she has done much in calling attention to the reality and truth of the heroines to know whom is a liberal education.

#### RICHARD GRANT WHITE

Mr. Richard Grant White was the first American Shakespearean scholar to win a European reputation. His criticism appeared for the most part in American magazines between 1850 and 1880, and was afterwards collected in *Studies in Shakespeare*. His *Shakespeare Scholar*, however, was published in 1854. This is a large octavo (500 pages). In it he gives an historical sketch of the text and the successive editors, a critical exami-

nation of the notes in Mr. Collier's folio, in which he completely disproves their value, and a review of the plays, devoted for the most part to a consideration of the various suggested readings. He published also two very beautiful editions of the plays, decidedly the best that had appeared up to that time in America. His knowledge of etymology and his acquaintance with Elizabethan literature make his textual criticism of high value, though he is a little inclined to incisive and sarcastic comments on his predecessors, most of whom well deserve his strictures. He has the merit denied to many textual critics of being entertaining, and the further not less rare merit of not adhering to an interpretation when he is convinced, or should be convinced, that it is wrong.

Mr. White's bent is not at all towards philosophical or æsthetic criticism. He was an artist, and a musical critic of high rank, and in spite of his etymological attainments the play appeared to him as a beautiful work of art, and he admires the comedies as much as the tragedies. He regards the characters as contemporary men and women rather than as heroes on the ideal plane, and he pays no attention to construction in the broad sense. Had he read Freytag's book, he would have felt impatient of the views it presents, as unpractical and fanciful. But his artistic sense made him an unerring judge of the actor's interpretation of a part or of a delicately sentimental or humorous scene. This instinctive perception of concrete beauty is compatible with a taste for philosophical analysis, but in Mr. White the two were not combined.

Thus, after saying that the dramatic unities are observed in *The Tempest*, he hastens to add:—

I do wrong to say that they are observed, which implies purpose on the part of the dramatist; and nothing is clearer

to me, the more I read and reflect upon his works, than that after his first three or four years' experience as a dramatist, he was entirely without any art-purpose or aim whatever, and used his materials just as they came to his hand, taking no more pains with them than he thought necessary to work them into a play that would please his audience and suit his company, while at the same time, from the necessities of his nature and the impulse that was within him, he brought out the characters of his personages with the knowledge of a creator of human souls, and in his poetry showed himself the supremest master of human utterance. *The Tempest* conforms to the unities of time and place merely because the story made it convenient for the writer to observe them ; the *Winter's Tale* defies them because its story made the observance of them very troublesome, and, indeed, almost, if not quite, impossible. There has been a great deal of ingenious speculation about Shakespeare's system of dramatic art. It is all unfounded, vague, and worthless. Shakespeare had no system of dramatic art. . . . Shakespeare did not write plays with 'central ideas.' In all such incidents as those referred to [*Merchant of Venice*] he merely followed the course or indications of the stories upon which he worked, as will appear in a very marked manner in the next play which we shall examine — *Romeo and Juliet*. . . . Shakespeare merely dramatized the old ballad to make a play to please his audience, just as any hack-playwright might to-day, who was engaged by a manager to do a like task. It merely happened that he had a peculiar way of doing such things. As to a moral, plainly nothing was further from Shakespeare's thought.

The above would tend to make Shakespeare a brilliant and skillful adaptor with the box-office in his mind. He did work over old stories, but he made them dramatic themes. He added or omitted incidents, and created characters out of names. The play frequently has a central moral conception totally different from the naïve, mediæval story on which it is founded. The subject brings up the very obscure question : What does the

conscious intelligence contribute to a work of art, and what is due to the unconscious soul? It cannot be dismissed in a summary way by saying, 'Shakespeare had no system of dramatic art.'

The ultra-materialistic form of interpretation which came in during the latter part of the century was a reaction from the ultra-romanticism of the earlier decades. Romanticism degenerates into sentimentalism as readily as genuine religious expression does into cant. It was natural that sturdy common sense should reassert itself, and go as far in denying inspiration and transcendental meaning as romanticism had in exalting them. But there is something very annoying in bald, common-sense criticism, because there is an element of truth in it, and that element is precisely what perverts it. Thus when we read, 'Shakespeare's case was in no wise essentially different from that of a young man from the country who nowadays comes to New York to join the staff of a newspaper. He simply brought his youth and talents to the central market and rose by the force of native abilities,' we feel like admitting the analogy. Shakespeare was a young man of 'native abilities'; he did 'come up' from the country to the city and enter into the competition of life. For the moment we forget how different was the 'coming up' on horseback, with leisurely conversation and greetings to other wayfarers and the stop at Oxford and Windsor and the loiterings on the country road, from being 'conveyed' on a railroad. 'The city' was in a different world from modern London. Realistic criticism overlooks the spiritual effects of environment, — its real, vital effect, — and calls a city a city; a young man of the sixteenth century the counterpart of his successor of the twentieth, and writing the same sort of trade then that it is now. The historic sense and the artistic sense are both in abeyance when such assertions

are taken literally, and we pin our faith to the dictum that human nature is the same radically in all ages.

In speaking of Mr. Fleay's method of determining the relative dates of the plays by the percentage of rhymes, of 'end-stopt lines,' 'weak endings,' and the like, Mr. White says, with much good sense :—

The student who proposes to enter upon the well-worked field of Shakespearean criticism, or to become his editor, might have his attention directed to certain minute traits of Shakespeare's versification in this second period. But to one who only seeks to enjoy Shakespeare's poetry and his dramatic creations and to follow the development of his powers, this would be dry, almost arithmetical, and quite unprofitable work. Nor can these traits of mere external form be relied upon with reasonable confidence. Their value as criterions depends in a great measure upon the theory of probabilities and chances; and this, although it is a safe guide as to the actions of mankind, cannot be trusted as regards the actions of one man. For in the latter case, there enter into the problem the indeterminable quantities of will, preference, deliberate intention, and passing mood. We may establish a formula by which we may determine with reasonable certainty how many letters will be dropped into a certain post-office without addresses or unsealed during a year, but we cannot in the same way determine how many in like condition any one man has dropped in or will drop in during the same time, for we can never be acquainted with all the circumstances and impulses which influence his action. Metrical tests, of whatever kind, have a value in the establishment of the order of production of a poet's works; but they are secondary and accessory and must be considered only in connection with all other evidence, external and internal.

The above embodies a sound principle of criticism. The percentages of metrical forms give no absolute proof of the date of a composition, but as far as they indicate qualities of style are entitled to great weight,

for style changes with practice, and it is very doubtful if a man could write in middle age as he did in his youth without considerable effort to imitate his younger self. The relative number of end-stopt and overflow lines, for instance, affects the intrinsic qualities of style that have to do with the substance of the poem, and in Shakespeare's case afford a pretty sure criterion of the maturity of the author. The relative number of rhymed and unrhymed lines, on the other hand, is a question of literary fashion, which might be dropped and then taken up again.

As might be anticipated from his matter-of-fact way of regarding the plays as written solely with a view to the London audience, Mr. White has little patience with the Germans or with æsthetic criticism. Ulrici he calls a 'mad mystic,' which is far enough from being just; and Gervinus, a 'literary Dogberry, bestowing his tediousness on all the world with a generosity surpassing that of his prototype,' which is hardly a less exaggerated statement. 'In my own edition,' he says, 'I avoided as much as possible the introduction of æsthetic criticism, not because of its difficulty, for it is easy and alluring work. . . . But in my judgment the duty of an editor is performed when he puts his reader as nearly as possible in the same position for the apprehension of his author's meaning that he would have occupied if he had been contemporary with him and had received from him a correct copy of his writings.' An editor who could put his readers in the 'same position for the apprehension of the author's meaning' as an average Elizabethan contemporary was, would be not only an editor but a commentator of inspired qualities, for he must re-create in us imaginatively the old superstitions, veneration for royalty, credulity about distant countries, and a temper of mind that has passed away entirely.

Commentators like Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and Ulrici help us to recapture a poetical apprehension of the author's meaning when not the bare content of the words, but the meaning, is felt, but even they cannot make us Elizabethans. Mr. White says further:—

Not a little of the Shakespearean criticism of this kind is the mere result of an effort to say something fine about what needs no gilding, no such prism-play of light to enhance or bring out its beauties. I will not except from these remarks much of what Coleridge himself has written about Shakespeare. But the German critics whom he emulated are worse than he. Avoid them. The German pretence that Germans have taught us folk of English blood and speech to understand Shakespeare is the most absurd and arrogant thing that could be set up. Shakespeare owes them nothing, and we have received from them little more than some maundering mystifications and much ponderous platitude. Like the western diver, they go down deeper and stay down longer than other critics, but like him, too, they come up muddier. Above all of them, avoid Ulrici and Gervinus.

The above, especially in grouping such different men as Ulrici and Gervinus, is unscholarly and uncritical, and can hardly be pardoned in view of Mr. White's undoubtedly valuable services. His examination of the tragedies minimizes the element of romance and strangeness and pushes common sense to the bounds of materialism. In his paper on *Hamlet* he certainly errs in saying that the Queen 'consented to, or at least winked at her husband's murder by her paramour.' This would change the entire ethical groundwork of the play as it is generally received, and would leave the ghost's injunction, —

nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught, —

without any justification.

He assumes also that Hamlet ‘could not have been more than twenty years old’ at the date of his father’s murder, and also that he was in college at the time. As the gravedigger says definitely that he was twenty-eight or thirty, we must take it for granted that it is the wreck of early manhood, not of youth, that the dramatist took as his theme. Horatio came from Wittenberg to the funeral. Had Hamlet been there, they would probably have come together, and certainly Hamlet would have known a fellow countryman in a strange city well enough to make it impossible for him to express the doubt implied in,—

Horatio,— or I do forget myself.

It is true, Hamlet has expressed a desire to go ‘back to Wittenberg,’ but that may as readily mean, back after an absence of four years, as back from a short absence. We must take it that Hamlet was at Elsinore at the time of his father’s murder. In his paper on *Lear* Mr. White assumes that the ‘Fool and Lear have grown old together.’ ‘The Fool has the marks of time upon his face as well as upon his mind, though the King is much the older.’ The better opinion is that the Fool is a young man, an affectionate feather-head, a contrast to the King in age and physique.

These are blemishes of no great importance, compared with Mr. White’s appreciation of the plays as artistic creations, as poetic representations of strong men and beautiful women in beautiful places. He pays no attention to the fact that the tragedies show us—what we can never learn from real life—how great men meet great trials and overwhelming misfortune. In his long chapter in *Shakespeare’s Scholar* on that powerful play *Measure for Measure* he takes a much lower view of the character of Isabella than most commentators do. He

regards her as radically cold-hearted, a professional prude, and a very disagreeable young woman, and it must be allowed that he makes out his case with great acuteness. It is easier to agree with him than with Gerinus, who calls her a 'complete human nature,' or with Mrs. Jameson, who gushes over her as an embodiment of angelic purity. The play is, however, such a tremendous indictment of sexual impurity as to be beyond the scope of ordinary criticism.

No one ever saw better than Mr. White how a Shakespearean play should be acted to bring out the dramatic truth as opposed to the theatrical effects. His sense of artistic propriety is unerring, and is especially evident in the chapters on 'the acting of Iago' and on 'Stage Rosalinds.'

Of Rosalind he says that she was thoroughly disguised by the trunk hose of the period, and that she should allow no suggestion of her feminine character to escape her when disguised, except when she is alone with Celia. The audience are in the secret, of course, but they do not wish to have Orlando seem like a fool in not discovering that Ganymede is a woman. Mr. White says:—

The absolute incongruity between the real Rosalind and the seeming Ganymede is the very essence of the comedy of the situation. One example of this, which I have never seen properly emphasized upon the stage: at the end of the first interview with Orlando in the forest, after she has wheedled him into wooing her as Rosalind, she asks him to go with her to her cot.

'*Ros.* Go with me to it, and I'll show it you: and by the way you shall tell me where in the forest you live. Will you go?

'*Orl.* With all my heart, good youth.

'*Ros.* Nay, you must call me Rosalind. Come, sister, will you go?'

Now, here most Rosalinds go shyly off with Celia, and leave Orlando to come dangling after them ; but when I read this passage I see Ganymede jauntily slip his arm into Orlando's, and lead him off, laughingly lecturing him about the name ; then turn his (or her) head over his (or her) shoulder and say, 'come, sister,' — leaving Celia astounded at the boundless 'cheek' of her enamoured cousin.

The article shows a very delicate appreciation of the comic spirit. Mr. White's sarcastic wit makes his textual notes entertaining, especially the long excursus in which he ridicules Schmidt's *Shakespearean Lexicon*. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, interest in industrial and scientific questions, fostered by the writings of Darwin, Spencer, and their disciples, brought about, as we said before, a temporary reaction against the romantic spirit. The world was to be interpreted in the terms of every-day phenomena, and the artist was no more than a superior workman. The spiritual was the unknowable, and the mysterious and awful, only something not yet understood. The old metaphysic was discredited, and the new not established. Mr. White's criticism reflects this passing temper of mind, which examines the phenomenon before it and refuses to investigate obscure motives or delicate mental reactions. But as he is an artist himself,—not merely a literary artist, like Coleridge, but a lover of beautiful things made by man,—he views the plays from an artistic standpoint, in spite of his unconscious deference to the spirit of the age. To him the drama was always an actable play, and as he knew better than any other writer on the subject how it ought to be acted, his criticism has justness and novelty even when he aims at common sense alone and scorns æsthetics, the soul of art.

## CHAPTER X

### THE LATER NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

MR. SWINBURNE'S *Study of Shakespeare* (1880) is the first detailed criticism of the plays by a poet of high rank (if we except the essays of Thomas Campbell) since the lectures of Coleridge seventy years before. Many others have left in short papers or poems testimony to their admiration. Many men of poetic sensibility, though not poetic craftsmen, as Hazlitt and Lamb, have expressed at length their appreciation of Shakespeare's poetic power, for it is not necessary that a man should possess technical skill in order to comprehend and criticise intelligently the highest expression of human thought and feeling. If he really loves art and has learned something of its historical development, he may be able to justify his love by a reasonable analysis and to touch other minds with something of his own enthusiasm. Nevertheless, what one great craftsman has to say of another has a peculiar interest, even when it is as hopelessly inadequate as Tolstoy's views of Shakespeare, for he rarely fails to take at least an independent and personal standpoint.

Mr. Swinburne's prose style is a very vicious one, but is full of animation and sonorous clangor. Excessively long and involved sentences containing from one hundred to one hundred and fifty words often bury the meaning in a redundancy of adjectives. These sentences are not only long, but they are neatly tied in an ornamented bow-knot, and if we can find the ends and pull on them they readily straighten out into a line of

thought, usually a truism which Mr. Swinburne's hatred of the commonplace has led him to adorn with extravagant rhetoric. One reason for his obscurity is that he rarely states his subject or predicate definitely, and we frequently have to wait till the next sentence to be sure of his meaning. If he wishes to speak of Shakespeare, Rabelais, and Cervantes, he calls them the 'divine and human trio of humorists whose names make radiant forever the century of their new-born glory.' We know that Shakespeare is one, for he is the subject of the book; we learn soon that Rabelais is the second, and on the next page the mention of Sancho shows us that Cervantes is the third. We could not have been certain of this till the name is mentioned, for Mr. Swinburne is so whimsical in his judgments that he might have been referring to some obscure writer. If he has occasion to mention Ben Jonson and Fletcher, he calls one the 'author of *Volpone*', and the other 'the creator of *Valentinian*.' Mr. Swinburne would say that he writes for intelligent adults only, and that his conundrums are not difficult ones; but they sometimes call for more ingenuity than a writer should demand of a reader. Lucidity is, after all, an artistic quality of prose. Mr. Swinburne's dislike of personal names is noticeable even when speaking of his contemporaries. His loathing and scorn for the members of the 'New Shakespearean Society,' especially for the estimable and laborious men who count the ten-syllable, eleven-syllable, rhymed and unrhymed, weak-ending and light-ending lines, is unmeasured, and expressed in unmeasured terms; but he mentions no names, and we can never be positive whether he is referring to Mr. Furnivall or Mr. Fleay or some one else who has excited his wrath. His sense of propriety forbids more than evident allusions, like the initials in eighteenth-century

pamphlets or Swift's manufactured names in *Gulliver's Travels*. His witty satire in the Appendix—one of the neatest literary skits of the century—is concerned solely with Mr. A., Mr. B., or Mr. C. In fact, he says:—

Never once in my life have I had or will I have recourse in self-defence, either to the blackguard's loaded bludgeon of personalities or to the dastard's sheathed dagger of disguise. I have reviled no man's person; I have outraged no man's privacy.

It is difficult to say what Mr. Swinburne's idea of a loaded bludgeon of personalities is, for in the same book we find, apropos of the egotistic, aristocratic prig and self-righteous murderer, Marcus Brutus, the following 'sheathed dagger' struck at the back of a man too old to answer and too highly honored by the world to make it worth while for his friends to answer for him:—

Whatever manner of man may have been the actual Roman, our Shakespearean Brutus is undoubtedly the very noblest figure of a typical and ideal republican in all the literature of the world. '*A democracy such as yours is my abhorrence*,' wrote Landor once to an impudent and foul-mouthed Yankee philosophaster (this word, permissible or not, but certainly convenient, is none of mine, but belongs to the late Mr. Kingsley), who had intruded himself on that great man's privacy in order to have the privilege of afterwards informing the readers of a pitiful pamphlet on England that Landor had 'pestered him with Southey,' an impertinence, I may add, which Mr. Landor at once rebuked with the sharpest contempt and chastised with the haughtiest courtesy. But the old friend and lifelong champion of Kossuth went on to say, his feelings were far different towards a republic.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By a *republic* he evidently meant an *aristocracy*. It is easy to see why many Englishmen of his class were hostile to the Union in our Civil War.

It is hard to believe that the above refers to the gentle and refined Emerson, and that the 'pitiful pamphlet' is *English Traits*, a book of shrewd and kindly comment and penetrating insight. Literature may be searched in vain for a more misplaced adjective than 'foul-mouthed' applied to a man so marked by purity of thought, reticence of expression, and delicacy of feeling. On turning to the passage we find that Emerson speaks of Landor in terms of high appreciation. The amusing thing in the extract is — or perhaps it is too extraordinary to be amusing — that Mr. Swinburne is entirely unconscious that Landor's words, 'A democracy such as yours is my abhorrence,' were insufferably insolent, judged by the ordinary standard of good breeding. To tell a man to his face that he is your abhorrence has at least the merit of courage, but to abuse a man's mother or his country by letter betokens a singular lack of conventional politeness, and may be 'haughty,' but certainly is not 'courtesy.' Both Mr. Landor and Mr. Swinburne display an extraordinary obtuseness, a thickness of perception, due to an absence of humor, rare among Englishmen of culture.

Mr. Swinburne's criticism of the plays is confined to sonorous eulogium. He even calls the *Comedy of Errors* a 'light and lovely work' — 'on its own ground perfect in its consistency, blameless in composition and coherence.' He apprehends the plays as beautiful things with all the fervor of a poet's fancy, and praises them with more than the enthusiasm of a passionate partisan. But he cannot point out where the beauty lies. He is like an old-fashioned exhorter, who can arouse careless souls, but knows no theology. He has not sufficient grasp of human nature to comprehend the characters, nor sufficient knowledge of the world to perceive the inner truth of the action and its correspondence to

universal law; but never, since the day of Coleridge, has the poetic beauty of the plays been celebrated in more convincing and enthusiastic terms. Analysis of any sort is foreign to his temperament, but his appreciations are instinctively right, even if sometimes expressed in exaggerated language. He combats vigorously the notion that Hamlet was irresolute, and we agree with him; but to the question, ‘If not irresolute why did he act irresolutely?’ he has no answer to give. It never occurs to him that such a question presents itself irresistibly to most readers, or that Hamlet is in any sense a study in human nature. Hamlet is good, he is charming. Hamlet says beautiful things, Iago says horrible things; that is enough. So the fine characters get rhapsodical admiration, the bad ones rhapsodical abuse, and they deserve it. What he says of Hamlet is admirable as far as it goes:—

I trust it will be taken as no breach of my past pledge to abstain from all intrusion on the sacred ground of Gigadibs and the Germans, if I venture to indicate a touch inserted by Shakespeare for no other perceptible or conceivable purpose than to obviate by anticipation the indomitable and ineradicable fallacy of criticism which would find the keynote of Hamlet’s character in the quality of irresolution. I may observe at once that the misconception involved in such a reading ought to have been evident even without this episodical stroke of illustration. In any case it should be plain to any reader that the signal characteristic of Hamlet’s inmost nature is by no means irresolution or hesitation or any form of weakness, but rather the strong conflux of contending forces. That during four whole acts Hamlet cannot or does not make up his mind to any direct and deliberate action against his uncle is true enough: true also we may say that Hamlet had somewhat more of mind than another man to make up and might properly want more time than another man to do it in; but not, I venture to say, in spite of Goethe,

through innate inadequacy to his task and unconquerable weakness of the will; not, I venture to think, in spite of Hugo, through immedicable scepticism of the spirit and irremediable propensity to nebulous intellectual refinement.

Mr. Swinburne proves his point, admitted now by the best critics, by the fact that the changes from the imperfect first quarto to the final form, including the great soliloquy on irresolution,—not in the folio,—do not improve the play for the stage,—already too long,—but do tend to lessen the impression that Hamlet's will-power was impaired,<sup>1</sup>—in fact, tend to establish the contrary. In speaking of Iago, Mr. Swinburne gives countenance to, if he does not originate, a view which is accepted in a more or less modified form by the best modern critics. He credits it to Thomas Carlyle, who drew the suggestion from the Germans, the objects of Mr. Swinburne's abhorrence. It rests on a supposed analogy between the criminal and the artist:—

Malignant as he is, the very subtlest and strongest component of his complex nature is not even malignity. It is the instinct of what Mr. Carlyle would call an inarticulate poet. In his immortal study on the ‘affair of the Diamond Necklace’ the most profound and potent humorist of the century has unwittingly touched on the mainspring of Iago's character—the ‘very pulse of the machine.’ He describes his Circe de la Mothe-Valois as a practical dramatic poet, or playwright at least, in lieu of play-writer: while indicating why and wherefore, with all her constructive skill and rhythmic art in action, such genius as she has so differs from

<sup>1</sup> I once said to a workingman who sat next me and witnessed the play for the first time, ‘Hamlet was a great fool, don't you think?’ He answered with conviction, ‘Well, I don't know. He was certainly *up against it for good*.’ This, in the vernacular, is the substance of Mr. Swinburne's criticism. The difficulty is to say just what moral *impasse* Hamlet is ‘*up against*’.

the genius of Shakespeare that she undeniably could not have written a *Hamlet*. Neither could Iago have written an *Othello*. . . . But what he can do he will: and if it be better to make a tragedy than to write one, to act a poem than to sing it, we must allow Iago a station in the hierarchy of poets very far in advance of his creator.

The analogy between the impulse of the poet to embody a story in beautiful form and the impulse of the malevolent criminal to act out his nature, is certainly an inverted one. Carlyle's great story is humorous and ironic. His idea that the 'two fixed ideas must meet,' that the French thief and the Italian quack are drawn to each other from a distance by wicked sympathy, is wonderfully striking, and is not so far from the reality of things, for the wicked do troop together. To put the creative artistic impulse on the same plane as the greed and lack of human sympathy that actuates the criminal, throws a lurid light on human nature by the power of contrast. But to assume that they are energies of the same character sinks all moral distinctions. The deification of the voluptuous and of the physical perfection of the human body, the obliteration of the line between spiritual and sensual beauty,— all rest on this same confusion of thought, which results, when carried to its legitimate end, in shocking and unnatural perversions, as all moral confusion must. The idea that Iago is a creative artist in evil, who takes to his work from pure enjoyment in malevolent action and makes a tragedy with the same zest with which Shakespeare writes one, has been sanctioned by some of the best critics of our day. Even Dr. Bradley, after specifying the more obvious springs of Iago's action, says: —

But Iago finally is not simply a man of action, he is an artist. His action is a plot, the intricate plot of a drama, and

in the conception and execution he experiences the tension and the joy of artistic creation.

But has this explanation any foundation in human nature as we see it and know it, and is it not destructive of any just philosophy of good and evil? Similar views were taken up and widely extended by the Pre-Raphaelites and their French prototypes, and result in no permanent addition to human thought. It certainly does not explain Macbeth, in whom the imaginative power was far more developed than in Iago. But inverted comparisons of this sort taken as humor are wonderfully suggestive; witness Carlyle's *Diamond Necklace*, which is as clearly ironical as De Quincey's *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* is farcical. Iago as evidently takes pleasure in gratifying his sense of power as does the ordinary scandal-monger in making mischief. But the delight of the artist is in producing something beautiful,—is disinterested and fed from springs of sympathy. The pleasure of the inventor or scientific investigator or of the artisan is akin to this. Their activity energizes in production. But the arch-plotters' activity is dedicated to destruction; and though there may be a diabolical pleasure in destruction, it is in no way akin to the joy of creation.

On any point relating to the author as poet or to the plays as poetry, Mr. Swinburne naturally speaks with an authority greater than that of any one since Coleridge. He is familiar with all Elizabethan dramatic literature,—a familiarity of loving appreciation, not of professional study. He loves Othello and Hamlet as if they were personal friends, perhaps far better than he would had they conversed with him in the flesh. On a technical point his judgment is unerring, for he knows good verse—it is the ‘stuff he has handled’ for fifty years. He well says:—

Now, all tragic poets, I presume from Æschylus, the god-like father of them all, to the last aspirant who may struggle after the traces of his steps, have been poets before they were tragedians ; their lips have had power to sing before their feet had strength to tread the stage, before their hands had skill to paint or carve figures from the life. With Shakespeare it was so as certainly as with Shelley, as evidently as with Hugo. It is in the great comic poets, in Molière as in Congreve, our own lesser Molière, so far inferior in breadth and depth, in tenderness and in strength, to the ‘greatest writer of the great age,’ yet so near him in science and in skill, so like him in brilliance and in force—it is in these that we find theatrical instinct twin-born with imaginative impulse, dramatic power with inventive perception.

That is all true enough. Young men can write love lyrics and comedies, but a tragedy is a ‘criticism of life’; and to criticise life intelligently the artist must have endured it, and to criticise it at once nobly and profoundly demands the breadth of perception and power of expression we call genius.

#### DR. DOWDEN

Professor Edward Dowden of Trinity College, Dublin, is the author of the very useful manual, *A Shakspere Primer*, in which is condensed all the evidence as to the date of appearance of the successive plays, external and internal. His longer book, *Shakspere, His Mind and Art*, is the best piece of sustained literary criticism that appeared in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is very attractively written, and has been very generally read in our country in the third edition, which came out in 1880. The first chapter contains an examination of the ethical tone of the Elizabethan period, with brief references to Spenser and Bacon as exponents of different phases of the spirit

of their time, and a consideration of Shakespeare as a product of his age,— a dramatic poet moulded by his environment. The governing idea of the book is the development of the poet in thought and technical skill, as shown by the progressive characters of the plays. One editor says that ‘the date of a play is the most trivial question, except questions on Shakespeare’s biography, on which time can be wasted.’ Considered as a bare fact, this may be true,— the date is of little importance compared to the play,— but as related to the growth of the most remarkable mind in the annals of time, the date becomes an important fact in the illustration of psychological law, and Dr. Dowden based an interesting and suggestive book on the subject.

The question of the chronological order, first treated competently by Malone, had, when he wrote, been settled as positively as it ever can be, and the labors of Fleay and Furnivall on the successive changes in style and the relative numbers of different verse-forms from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *Winter's Tale* had corroborated the evidence from other sources, and the facts were ready for whatever interpretation they would bear.

Professor Dowden was familiar with modern German criticism, and this led him to imitate in some degree the fantastical method of the Germans, and to attribute to Shakespeare a conscious effort after self-culture— a dedication of himself to artistic improvement and a conscious training in a poetic curriculum after the manner of Milton. For instance, he says:—

When these poems were written [*Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*] Shakspeare was *cautiously* feeling his way (page 46).

Setting aside *Titus Andronicus* and *Marina*, four dra-

*matic experiments* by Shakspere remain, each in a different manner from the rest (page 49).

During the years in which the poet was experimenting on history, comedy, and farce, that about which he was most of all *secretly concerned* was a tragedy (*Romeo and Juliet*) (page 50).

Shakspere, when he had completed his English historical plays, *needed rest for his imagination*, and in such a mood, craving refreshment and recreation, he wrote his play of *As You Like It* (page 67).<sup>1</sup>

Now, when writing *Hamlet*, his second tragedy, Shakspere, we must needs believe, *determined* that he would break away from the influence of his first tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* (page 88).

We shall rather think of him [Shakespeare] as a man possessing immense potential strength, but aware of certain weaknesses of his own nature: *resolved* therefore to be stern with himself and to master those weaknesses; *resolved* to realize all that potential strength which lay within him (page 146).

But having in *Macbeth* *studied* the ruin of a nature which gave fair promise in men's eyes of greatness and nobility, Shakspere, it may be, proceeded directly to a similar *study* in *Antony* (page 248).

Shakspere's admiration of the great men of action is immense, because he himself was primarily not a man of action. He is stern to all idealists, because he was aware that he might too easily yield himself to the tendencies of an idealist (page 250).

Citations similar to the above, implying that Shakespeare consciously trained his powers, and 'meant to teach' us something, might be multiplied, and all imply an erroneous conception. We know that Shakespeare was a poet, and we have a right to infer that in common with all poets he experienced the rapture of creation

<sup>1</sup> Is there not more imaginative work in *As You Like It* than in *Henry V*?

and the supreme content which follows the production of something beautiful. We know, too, from the plays themselves, that as he increased in years he increased in favor with the muses, that when he was young he wrote on young men's subjects in a young man's manner, and that maturity brought strength, and practice, ease. But to say that he consciously went through a poetio education and reserved himself for profound subjects till he thought he was strong enough for them, is mere guesswork. We can see from the volume of the plays that he was very industrious, a wonderful observer, and a great reader, for one cannot acquire a knowledge of classic mythology without reading. As far as we know, he regarded his plays merely as drawing cards for the theatre, and took no more interest in them after they were staged than a brilliant editorial writer does in last year's articles. His plays were apparently written for the company, and without the slightest reference to posterity. In the sonnets he discloses his belief that good poetry is a legacy to the world, but not in the plays. In a word, as far as we know, they were strictly professional work, and so regarded by their author. This may be wrong, but there is no evidence to the contrary, and criticism must be based on what Professor Dowden calls a 'firm grasp of fact,' and not on theories. But the theories are well put and interesting, and even if not accepted in their entirety give us an idea of the difference between the earlier and the later work of a poet.

Dr. Dowden's analysis of the characters is lifelike, and embodies the results of the best modern thought on the subject, English and German. He says of Ophelia, with truth : —

She is a tender, fragile, little soul who might have grown to her slight perfection in some neat garden-plot of life. Hamlet falls into the too frequent error of supposing that a man

gains rest and composure through the presence of a nature weak, gentle, and clinging; and that the very incapacity of such a nature to share the troubles of heart and brain which beset one must be a source of refreshment and repose. . . . There is an exchange of little tokens between the lovers, but of the large exchange of soul there is none; and Hamlet in his bitter mood can truthfully exclaim, 'I never gave you aught.'

But Hamlet fell in love with her during his 'father's life, when he felt no need of 'rest and composure.'

Dr. Dowden points out that, as soon as Ophelia brings out the casket of his gifts, Hamlet perceives that she had come to the palace oratory on purpose, and most likely had been sent. He longs for sincerity, but 'Ophelia is joined with the rest of them; she is an impostor, a spy, incapable of truth, of honor, of love.' In his estimate of the character of Hamlet Dr. Dowden follows in the main the Goethe-Schlegel-Coleridge theory of exaggerated reflective powers and weak will, but adds:

But Hamlet is not merely or chiefly intellectual; the emotional side of his nature is quite as important as the intellectual; his malady is as deep-seated in his sensibilities and in his heart as it is in his brain. If all his feelings translate themselves into thoughts, it is no less true that all his thoughts are impregnated with feelings. To represent Hamlet as a man of preponderating power of reflection and to disregard his craving, sensitive heart, is to make the whole play incoherent and unintelligible.

It is very evident that Hamlet is of an affectionate nature and that he is predisposed to intellectual subtleties. But the question is, why does he stand paralyzed before a certain deed the performance of which is imposed on him by the highest authority and sanctioned by deep-seated instinct of duty? He is evidently a hu-

man type. Can we point to any men of his type in the world? Dr. Dowden does not attempt to explain Hamlet, but he describes him and his actions admirably.

The critic closes his paper by saying, ‘One thing, however, we *do* know — that the man who wrote the play of *Hamlet* had obtained a thorough comprehension of Hamlet’s malady.’ Is this altogether certain? May not the artist create something greater than himself, something about which lingers the mystery of life? It is certainly so with musicians and painters, why not with poets, too? Do they not sometimes ‘build better than they know’? Hamlet did not understand himself. Is it certain that his creator understood him?

Dr. Dowden treats with sense and ability a question which in the latter part of the nineteenth century began to vex the souls of many worthy radicals, that is, did Shakespeare feel the true aristocrat’s disdain for the lower orders? As the point is comparatively modern, the passage is given at length: —

Shakspeare, a great modern poet (Walt Whitman) has said, ‘is incarnated, uncompromising feudalism in literature.’ Shakspeare is surely something more human and permanent than feudalism; but it is true he is not in the modern sense democratic. That he recognized the manly worth and vigor of the English people is evident. It cannot be denied, however, that when the people are seen in masses in Shakspeare’s plays, they are nearly always shown as factious, fickle, and irrational. To explain this fact we need not suppose that Shakspeare wrote to flatter the prejudice of the *jeunesse dorée* of the Elizabethan period. How could Shakspeare represent the people otherwise? In the Tudor period the people had not yet emerged. The people, like Milton’s half-created animals, is still pawing to get free its hinder parts from the mire. The mediæval attempts to resist oppression, the risings of peasants or of citizens, inaugurated commonly

by the murder of a lord or of a bishop, were for the most part desperate attempts, rash and dangerous, sustained by no sense of adequate moral or material power. It is only after such an immense achievement as that of 1784, such a proof of power as the French Revolution afforded, that moral dignity, the spirit of self-control and self-denial, the heroic devotion of masses of men to ideas and not merely interests, could begin to manifest themselves. Shakspere studied and represented in his art the world which lay before him. If he prophesied the future, it was not in the ordinary manner of prophets, but only by completely embodying the present, in which the future was contained.

Dr. Dowden's book is full of contagious enthusiasm for the plays, and is one of the best books, if not the best, a young student can read.

#### TOLSTOY

There had been no systematic belittling of Shakespeare since Voltaire's diatribe in the eighteenth century till the Russian, Count Tolstoy, published a *Critical Essay on Shakespeare* in 1901, which was prompted by an article on the poet's attitude towards the working classes by Mr. Ernest Crosby of New York. Anything that comes from the author of *Anna Karénina* and *War and Peace* is entitled to consideration, even though it proves that a great artist may be entirely lacking in critical faculty. He declares that he has 'read Shakespeare in every possible form; in Russian, in English, in German, and in Schlegel's translation,' and 'invariably underwent the same feelings: repulsion, weariness, and bewilderment.' 'At the age of seventy-five, being desirous once more to test myself,' he says, 'I have again read the whole of Shakespeare and have felt with even greater force the same feelings — this time, however, not of bewilderment but of firm

indubitable conviction that the unquestionable glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys is a great evil, as is every untruth.'

He takes *King Lear* as the play which is regarded as the finest production of the poet, and rehearses the plot in realistic language. Of course it is impossible to paraphrase any romantic tale in this manner without making it seem absurd; the sublime is easily made ridiculous by bad acting or a change of words. He says:—

Any man not under hypnotic suggestion must be convinced that it is a very bad, carelessly composed production, which, if it could have been of interest to the public at a certain time, cannot evoke among us anything but aversion and weariness. Every reader of our time who is free from the influence of suggestion will also receive exactly the same impression from all the other extolled dramas of Shakespeare, not to mention the senseless dramatized tales,—*Pericles*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, and *Troilus and Cressida*.

Classing the above plays together is something that Voltaire in his most venomous mood would never have done, because he would have known that it would destroy his claim, not only to critical acumen, but to the simplest comprehension of dramatic art. To attribute the admiration of Shakespeare to 'suggestion' is an extraordinary thing. Undoubtedly there have been such things as popular delusions, when the judgment of numbers of people is in abeyance, as in the Children's Crusade or the excitement over witchcraft in the seventeenth century, but the very essence of such a delusion is that it is temporary and followed by a reaction. The world is not always crazy. A delusion of all the world for three centuries is impossible. Count Tol-

stoy uses scientific terms, as ‘development’ and ‘germ,’ in *War and Peace*, in the same uncomprehending manner.

The critic seems destitute of historic knowledge, for he says: —

It often happens that even during these obviously intentional efforts after effect, as, for instance, the dragging out by the legs of half a dozen corpses, with which all Shakespeare’s tragedies terminate, instead of feeling fear and pity one is tempted rather to laugh.

The most elementary knowledge of the Elizabethan stage would inform him that after a fight, in the absence of curtain, it was necessary to ‘drag off the body.’

He writes: ‘All his characters speak not their own but always one and the same Shakespearean pretentious and unnatural language, in which not only they could not speak, but in which no living man ever had spoken or does speak.’

If he means by that that they sometimes speak blank verse, he is correct, for the plays are poetry, and the Greeks discovered long ago that rhythmical language conveyed emotion as does no other form. The critic says that the characters all ‘suffer from a common intemperance of language.’ ‘They speak all alike. Lear raves exactly as does Edgar when feigning madness. Both Kent and the fool speak alike.’

There must be a mistranslation here, unless Russians use the same word for ‘alike’ and ‘different.’ But the critic goes on to astonish us still further when he says that ‘in Shakespeare there is no expression of character’ and that ‘his characters are mostly depicted, not by the dramatic method, which consists in making each person speak with his own diction, but in the epic method of one person describing the features of another,’ a state-

ment directly contrary to the fact, as any one who needs to be convinced can easily assure himself by reading the first act of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. The critic, however, is consistent; for he says that the originals, the old play of *Leir*, the *Hystorie of Hamblet*, and the story of the *Moor and the Wicked Ensign*, which no one reads by choice, are more interesting, more natural, than the plays founded on them. After this we are not surprised to hear that 'Emilia has not even the slightest semblance to a real character.' In fact, we are rudderless in a sea of unfounded assertion and impossible explanations. Falstaff is, however, too much for him, and is, he declares, 'perhaps the only natural and typical character depicted by Shakespeare.' Hamlet is too much for him in another way; for he declares, 'There is no possibility of finding any explanation whatever of Hamlet's actions or words, and therefore no possibility of attributing any character to him.' Some persons might reasonably think that 'there is no possibility of finding any explanation whatever' of Count Tolstoy's words.

It is inexplicable that a writer of novels should not perceive the naturalness of the conversation in Shakespeare's dramas and the individual character of their utterances, extending even to little peculiarities of manner and tricks of expression. Macbeth never swears nor puns. Hamlet has an odd way of reduplicating his words, and there is a soldier-like heartiness in Othello's speeches before he is overcome by mental distress, and at all times a poetic coloring quite different from that with which Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear invest their thoughts. The speeches come from a mental point of view, and are the result of a mental operation sometimes very difficult to follow. Like real people the characters sometimes say unexpected things, which strike us as

inconsequent till we know the persons better. The conversation, too, is frequently absolutely natural:—

*Ham.* Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.

Hold you the watch to-night?

*Mar. Ber.* We do, my lord.

*Ham.* Arm'd, say you?

*Mar. Ber.* Arm'd, my lord.

*Ham.* From top to toe?

*Mar. Ber.* My lord, from head to foot.

*Ham.* Then saw you not his face?

*Hor.* Oh yes, my lord, he wore his beaver up.

Hamlet asks a few more eager questions about the appearance of the ghost, and then follows this dialogue:

*Ham.* I would I had been there.

*Hor.* It would have much amazed you.

*Ham.* Very like, very like. Stay'd it long?

Is there any other person in the plays who would have interjected that singular remark, ‘Very like, very like’? Imagine Macbeth using the words in similar circumstances! It is out of the question. But from Hamlet they seem so appropriate that we hardly notice their unique oddity.

Not only is the conversation of Shakespeare's characters absolutely natural and the outcome of their personalities, but the speakers rarely address the audience, or say anything for the sake of effect. They talk to each other. Even their soliloquies are self-communications,—mental disclosures,—not addresses to the audience. But when we consider such dialogue as the scene between Brutus and Cassius (*Julius Cæsar*) or the angry parle between Kent and Lear, where the words come hot from the heart, and especially when we notice the contrast between Kent's defiance of his liege and his farewell:—

Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu ;  
He 'll shape his old course in a country new, —

which is plainly addressed to the audience, we cannot understand how any novelist could fail to mark that the speeches of Shakespeare's characters are essentially dramatic and individual. Indeed, this was the point remarked on by the earliest and most superficial criticism.

Count Tolstoy attributes the reputation for depicting character which Shakespeare possesses to a little matter of technical skill easily acquired by an intelligent playwright, in which several of his contemporaries equaled him.

However unnatural the positions may be in which he places his characters, however improper to them the language which he makes them speak, however featureless they are, the very play of emotion, its increase and alteration, and the combination of many contrary feelings, as expressed correctly and powerfully in some of Shakespeare's scenes and in the play of good actors, evokes, even if only for a time, sympathy with the persons represented. Shakespeare, himself an actor and an intelligent man, knew how to express by the means not only of speech but of exclamation, gesture, and the repetition of words, states of mind and developments or changes of feeling taking place in persons represented. So that in many instances Shakespeare's characters, instead of speaking, merely make an exclamation or weep, or in the middle of a monologue, by means of gestures demonstrate the pain of their position (just as Lear asks somebody to unbutton him) or in moments of great agitation, repeat a question several times or several times demand the repetition of a word which has particularly struck them, as do Othello, Macduff, Cleopatra, and others. Such clever methods of expressing the development of feeling, giving good actors the possibility of demonstrating their powers, were, and are, often mistaken by many

critics for the expression of character. But however strongly the play of feeling may be expressed in one scene, a single scene cannot give the character of a figure when this figure, after a correct exclamation or gesture, begins in a language not its own, at the author's arbitrary will, to volubly utter words which are neither necessary nor in harmony with its character.

Had the critic cited passages in support of his position, we might have been able to tell what he means. He seems to be exalting technical skill in writing emotional scenes for the actors, but says that Shakespeare followed them by unnatural language. The only place that occurs to us where the criticism applies, is Kent's rhymed soliloquy after his quarrel with Lear just referred to. The writing of passionate or emotional scenes is, of course, great art.

The critic also says that Shakespeare is destitute of the 'sense of measure,' meaning apparently reserve or moderation.

In Shakespeare everything is exaggerated ; the actions are exaggerated, so are their consequences ; the speeches of the characters are exaggerated, and therefore at every step the possibility of artistic impression is interfered with. Whatever people may say, however they may be enraptured by Shakespeare's works, whatever merits they may attribute to them, it is perfectly certain that he was not an artist, and that his works are not artistic productions. Without the sense of measure there never was nor can be an artist, as without the feeling of rhythm there cannot be a musician. Shakespeare might have been whatever you like, but he was not an artist.

Shakespeare's tragedies, except *Hamlet*, deal with the explosive expression of violent emotions by powerful natures. They are destitute of the restrained dignity of classic art. This is because he was a Teuton expressing

in the Teutonic manner the vigorous Teutonic nature, which ‘gives itself away’ in moments of great excitement. There are passages in the tragedies which Pericles or Virgil would have considered extravagant, and there are passages which even we, to the manner born, would prefer to have toned down nearer to the dignity of Corneille. There is one kind of artistic power in the suggestion of emotion restrained by a sense of measure, and another kind in the stormy outbursts of Lear or Othello. It is singular that the race whose everyday expression is grave and unemphatic should originate the violent method of dramatic expression, and the lively, gesticulating Latin people should represent the distress of great natures with the decorum and reserve of the high Roman fashion. But to admit that there are places where Shakespeare’s redundant excitement might be tempered, and the effect be as powerful and more agreeable, does not concede that the Teutonic way of telling a story is radically bad art compared to the Greek way. At least the former does not degenerate into a stiff formalism, in its worst. In *Titus Andronicus*, or the tragedies of Webster, it is repulsive, but not tiresome.

Count Tolstoy declares :—

Until the end of the eighteenth century Shakespeare not only failed to gain any special fame in England but was valued less than his contemporary dramatists, Ben Jonson, Fletcher, Beaumont, and others. [Who were the others, besides Massinger?] His fame originated in Germany and thence was transferred to England.

That this is historically incorrect must be evident to any one with even a superficial knowledge of literary history. Shakespeare’s reputation has gone through phases of interpretation, but not of magnitude, since

his death in the seventeenth century. It was only during a short period in the seventeenth century that other Elizabethan playwrights were valued more than he, and then only by playgoers, not by the literary public. German criticism of the early nineteenth century was no doubt gratifying to Englishmen, but the criticism of Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey had far more to do with establishing a philosophical basis for the dramatist's fame than anything Goethe, Lessing, Schlegel, and Schiller could say. In fact there has always been a disposition to laugh at German criticism, except among the best critics, and even they reject much of the commentary of continental scholars. The idea that a nation waits till foreigners discover their national poet and then sustains the foreign verdict, if ever true, is certainly not so in the case of William Shakespeare.

The critic finds fault with the Shakespearean tragedy because his plays do not embody a religious motif. Originally dramatic art and government were closely connected with religion. Time has shown clearly that the government and religion should not be in the hands of the same persons, and large provinces of life have developed in the Christian era and become the proper subject of dramatic art. Shakespeare might have made a powerful play turning on religious martyrdom. Why he did not, we cannot tell; perhaps the censor who at one time would not allow the name of God to be spoken on the stage would not license anything that might stir up religious animosity, perhaps Shakespeare regarded all religious disputes as sectarian. When he adapted *King John* he struck out everything appealing to religious prejudice, as well as the vulgar matter satirizing the Catholics. But his plays represent the world as it is, and are therefore essentially moral. They show the

evil which results from violation of the primitive ties of loyalty, love, friendship, or family affection. They attribute a holy and sacred nature to chastity and honor. They teach as life teaches, for they select from life what is most impressive of reality, and that is all the secular drama can do. Count Tolstoy affirms, 'That man alone can write a drama who has something to say to men, and something which is of the greatest importance to them; about man's relation to God, to the Universe, to the All, the Eternal, the Infinite.' That might be true of the twelfth century, but the Elizabethan drama has to do with man's relation to men. If this is misrepresented, secular art may be immoral; if it is represented with truth and referred to the proper principles, the drama is moral and cannot be irreligious. A novel may turn on religious emotion, as *Robert Elsmere* does, but *Anna Karénina* is a better moral lesson than *Robert Elsmere*, and it is as devoid of the religious element as *Macbeth* or *Lear*. The day of the Passion Play or the liturgical play has long passed, and had passed when Shakespeare wrote.

Count Tolstoy's critique is printed as a preface to an article on 'Shakespeare's Attitude towards the Working Classes' by Mr. Ernest Crosby, though the latter occupies less than one third of the book; and it is quite evident that the animus of Tolstoy's animadversions comes from a feeling that Shakespeare was aristocratic in his sympathies and not disposed to do justice to laboring men, whose cause the Russian writer has so passionately espoused. There is no good reason for this. Shakespeare shows us a proud aristocrat like Coriolanus vituperating the plebs in contemptuous terms. This is true history, and true to the character of the Roman, and true to Shakespeare's artistic method as a satirist. He invariably represents a street mob as

irrational and fickle, whether composed of Romans or Englishmen. In his representation he does Jack Cade injustice, but he follows the only historical record accessible to him. A mob was to him something disorganized, dangerous, and unintelligent; he did not understand that civil liberty and equal participation in the rights of a citizen were to be reached only through violent and irregular effort. In manhood suffrage and the rule of the majority he probably had no faith whatsoever, and he was perfectly right, for they are destructive till the principle of representative government has been firmly established and the power of the executive over taxation and the standing army limited. This was not done till forty years after his death, and he could not foresee that a picked body of Englishmen, in whom the traditions of the original rights of the Saxon freemen still survived, would isolate themselves in a distant wilderness and prove that a government by freemen was still possible, still less that it would be found after two centuries that the privileges of the freemen might safely be extended to the entire body of residents. It is certainly not to be wondered at that Shakespeare should know nothing of the possibilities of democracy before the experiment was made. One might as well expect him to anticipate the principles of evolution in the physical world.

The ordered society of Shakespeare's day probably seemed to him the necessary safeguard of law and civil peace. Apparently, it made a strong appeal to his imagination as an historic organism, if we may judge from the force and eloquence with which the wise Ulysses describes the state, or Archibishop Chichele compares the civil order to the bees, though it is dangerous to ascribe to the dramatist the personal sentiments of any of his characters. Where a representative of the lower

orders is brought on the stage he is represented as simple; but loyal and honest and industrious. As Dr. Bradley says: 'He has no respect for the plainer and simpler kind of people as politicians, but a great respect and regard for their hearts.' He satirizes the mob in *Coriolanus*, and he makes good-natured fun of the artisans' attempts at theatricals in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but he never satirizes plain people as Chaucer does in the *Canterbury Tales*, where the Wife of Bath (Dame Quickly is refined compared to her), the Miller, the Reve, and the Pardoner are all hopelessly vulgar. A very neat interpretation of *The Tempest*, where Caliban represents the laborer; Stephano and Trinculo, labor-leaders; and Prospero, capital, was made some years ago, and, though confessedly fanciful, is as good an argument as can be brought to prove that Shakespeare felt the rich man's disdain of the poor. Shakespeare's first play was a satire on enthusiastically intellectual young men. Vanity and pretense in the rich he ridicules scathingly: Slender and Shallow, country gentlemen; Osric, the courtier who 'has much land and fertile' (there is something suggesting personal bitterness on the author's part in the disdain Hamlet feels for him); Polonius, the type of the worldly-wise conventional old man; and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a knight, but addle-pated, and many others, are rich. He arraigns kings and nobles, and if they cannot 'make good,' they are rebuked with sternest justice. Nowhere does he favor the rich or well-born as such; he is the advocate for humanity. Tolstoy's love for humanity is no justification for hostility to Shakespeare.

There is one quality of Shakespeare's lines which is the first that appeals to the reader, and that is the music and the eloquence and pith of his phrases. Many

of his sentences have the folk quality of proverbs, and the wit shines through the dullest translation. As for his music, the foreigner ought to be warmed and touched by it. Every American boy or girl of sensibility perceives the music in La Fontaine or Virgil as soon as one hundred lines are painfully construed. How can any one who is not tone-deaf miss the melody of Macbeth's

Duncan is in his grave;

After life's fitful fever he sleeps well,

or of the songs in *As You Like It*, especially of Iris's,

There is mirth in heaven

When earthly things made even

Atone together,

or of hundreds of other well-known lines?

Count Tolstoy says he has read Shakespeare in English, otherwise his lack of reference to one of the most noticeable qualities of the lines might be explained by saying that the music was lost in the translation as the music of the Iliad is lost in Pope's rhymed version. Count Tolstoy's love for humanity is a noble passion, but it blinds his reason. If the judgment of all educated Russians who love their fellow men is equally perverse, what hope is there for the elevation of his countrymen?

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CLOSE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BARRETT WENDELL

PROFESSOR WENDELL'S *William Shakspere* follows the same general outline as Dowden's *Shakspere, his Mind and Art*,<sup>1</sup>—that is, it regards the plays primarily as events in the development of the artistic powers of the poet. Such a method was not possible till the chronology of the plays had been established and the plays themselves had been thoroughly studied. Professor Wendell, however, owes very little to his predecessor, Dr. Dowden, who connects the development shown in the plays with growth in the author's power due to life experiences of which we have no certain knowledge, for he regards the plays simply as marking successive dates in the normal growth of natural artistic power in the period from young manhood to maturity. If the growing seriousness they evince is due to anything more than the natural replacement of the joyous energy of youth by the thoughtful earnestness of middle life, we have no evidence of such a cause, nor can we safely deduce it from the apparent self-confessions of the sonnets. Professor Wendell's book borrows no interest from plausible conjecture about psychological states induced by the treachery of friend or mistress or personal knowledge of the evil of the world bitten in by disappointment and disillusion. Taking the plays as

<sup>1</sup> Professors Dowden and Wendell follow the spelling *Shakspere*. The form has not commended itself, and, except when referring to their books, I use the ancient spelling *Shakespeare*.

we have them and the chronological order as it is established, he inquires what sort of a series do they make, what is the nature of the progression from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *The Tempest*? Is it uniform, or are there lapses? What can we learn about the artistic mind by examining the succession broadly and in detail?

Professor Wendell is entirely free from several erroneous conceptions which have vitiated Shakespearian criticism from Dr. Johnson down. The first is that the artist means to teach a moral lesson, and the second, that the artist aims consciously at the production of something the form of which is worked out in his own mind beforehand. He holds that the act of poetic creation is largely spontaneous and the result of 'subconscious cerebration,' that the character which is embodied in a portrait or a drama forms itself as the artist thinks over it, and may fairly be said to have an independent life and to come into being without, even against, the artist's volition. This, of course, is true only of the highest type of artist. We call them creative, precisely because they do not create. Thus Professor Wendell says:—

The *Merchant of Venice* is full of implicit wisdom and beauty and significance. That Shakspere realized all this, however, does not follow. Critics who declare a great artist fully conscious of whatever his work implies are generally those who least know how works of art are made.

One thing, however, is certain. The nearer any work of art approaches, not the details, but the proportions of actual life, the nearer the imagination of its maker approaches in its scheme the divine imagination which has made our infinitely mysterious world, the more endlessly suggestive that work of art must always be. To the artist, however, all this meaning is often as strange as to one who meets for the first time the

work in which it lies implied. What the artist knows is often no more than a blind conviction that thus and not otherwise the mood which possesses him must be expressed. Those who find in the great artists consciously dogmatic philosophers are generally those who are the least artists themselves.

It is prudent to warn whoever has not carefully watched the work of artists that no valid conclusion concerning their actual lives and characters can be drawn from even their most sincere artistic achievements.

We may still be sure that even deliberate, conscious, fundamentally historic art can express nothing beyond what the artist has known. His knowledge may come from his own experience, or from the experience of others whom he has watched; or from experiences recorded in history or in literature; or even from the vividly imagined experiences of creatures whom he himself has invented. Actually or sympathetically, however, he must somehow have known the moods which he expresses. In the sense then that what any artist expresses must somehow have formed a part of his mental life, all art may be called self-revealing, autobiographic.

The above extracts indicate a theory of artistic creation which will enable the critic to avoid the mistakes of those who believe in outside divine inspiration, or think that artistic activity is precisely similar to the ordinary mental processes of logical construction. The last paragraph might have been supplemented by adding as a source of knowledge the great hinterland of race experience, a source from which we all draw profound emotional susceptibilities, which only the artist can make articulate. Shakespeare might have learned from books or from observation how a man like Othello would have felt when he believed his wife untrue, but he could not have felt the depth of the outrage, the sense of wrong which death only could expiate; he never could have written 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,' had he not come

from a race to which the purity of the wife was an ancestral religion. He could have learned that a man like Hamlet would sport with his mental anguish and hide it with trifling jests and an antic disposition, but how did he know that the knowledge of his mother's infidelity would cause him such deep-seated distress? For thousands of years his Germanic forefathers had held the matron sacred, the adulteress punishable by death, and bastard a word of shame. The artist is a man in whom ancestral sensibilities and prejudice and appetites and passions, though subconscious, realize themselves promptly, and who has the gift to embody them so that they appeal to us and we respond. The Japanese artist is different from the Germanic artist because there come to the surface in him a different set of ancestral experiences, as the samurai differs from the knight.

Professor Wendell's theory of artistic action gives a far more rational explanation of William Shakespeare and his relation to the plays than those of his predecessors.

After a short introduction, the book gives a chapter to the 'Facts of Shakspere's Life' and another to 'The Theatre until 1587.' The poems are then considered. Here, as throughout the book, conjecture is not indulged in. Facts are given, and only such deductions as may fairly be said to flow from the facts. That Elizabethan audiences were very fond of ingenious constructions, of puns, figurative twists of meaning, and the like, as the author contends, is quite evident, as much so from their serious as from their light compositions. Professor Wendell also points out, from an examination of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare's poems, that Shakespeare's language is the more concrete and his figures less conventional. The concrete and even homely nature of Shakespeare's words

had been noticed before, but never so convincingly illustrated. The author says that it arises from an ‘instinctive habit of mind in which the natural alliance of words and concepts was uniquely close.’ It is one of the ways in which a man’s mental habit and vision influence his expression and make his talk interesting. It gives Shakespeare’s style that most precious quality, life. It is illustrated when he changes Salisbury’s speech in the original of *Henry VI*, —

See how the pangs of death do gripe his heart, —  
to

See how the pangs of death do *make him grin*.

Shakespeare changed in the course of his life his verse-form and his habitual sentence construction, but this matter of using concrete figures was characteristic of him from youth to middle age. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* he wrote, —

Is not love a Hercules  
Still *climbing trees* in the Hesperides,  
and

This fellow picks up wit as *pigeons, pease*.

And he makes Prospero, in his farewell, speak of —

The green sour ringlets . . .  
Whereof the ewe not bites,

and the elves

Whose pastime  
Is to make *midnight mushrooms*.

From the beginning he possessed this concreteness of phrase, the vividness which distinguished his style from any other.

Professor Wendell takes up the plays in succession, giving in each case an epitome of the known facts and

acute and intelligent deductions. For the first time the scientific method is combined with literary appreciation and imaginative insight. The central theme being the development of the dramatist as artist, the relation of the action of the plays to a sane philosophy of life or any analysis of the great tragic heroes would be out of place; but the artistic character of each play—quite as important and interesting a consideration—receives adequate treatment. The facts are interpreted as landmarks in the march of a great artistic soul, an interpreter of life and nature, and not left us, as on the pages of Fleay or Furnivall, as mere records without significance. He points out that Shakespeare's life covered the rise, culmination, and decline of Elizabethan dramatic production; for Marlowe, the pioneer, and he were born the same year, and Beaumont, who marks the beginning of the decadence, died just before the great master; and that in his early work are found traces of archaic theatrical conventions. Of his versatility he says:—

When we consider Shakspere's experiments, however, ranging over the first six years of his professional life, we are presently impressed by the fact that no two of them are alike. One is a tragedy of blood, one is a chronicle history, one is a fantastic comedy after the manner of Lyly, one is something resembling a pseudo-classical comedy, one is a kind of romantic comedy which later Shakspere made peculiarly his own, one is a fashionable erotic poem.

He brings out the interesting point that the poet made his romantic plots plausible by 'adopting and developing for his purposes the conventional device of the induction,' that is, by presenting at first something quite possible in real life and, as soon as we have become interested in the characters, passing on to the strange and fanciful part of the story. Thus the *Merchant of Venice*

opens with a scene in which a merchant, embarrassed by too many speculative ventures, is worried over the future, and his friend tries to cheer him. Then we pass on to the romantic Belmont, and even here Portia and Nerissa discuss the suitors in womanly fashion before the absurd condition of the choice of the caskets is alluded to. The same feature is observable in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *As You Like It*, but it is not quite clear whether all this is not the result of sound art rather than a reminiscence of the earlier induction. *Macbeth* at least opens with a supernatural scene, which has much the effect of a musical overture.

Professor Wendell takes the ground that 'Elizabethan England was childishly brutal,' and that the temper of the age was such that Shylock was simply an object of aversion and contempt to the audience. Shakespeare's genius, he says, made the Jew 'grandly human,' and to our broader sympathies he is a tragic figure, though originally intended as a comic or at least a repulsive one. This may be true, but a study of all the stage Jews of the period would be necessary to prove it. It would seem at first glance almost impossible that the old man's inflexibility and pride of race would not have roused the admiration of some of the audience, though in the Middle Ages the Jew was undoubtedly the object of a fierce race hatred. If this point is not altogether proved, we cannot follow Professor Wendell when he says, 'Only when we understand that King Lear, for all his marvellous pathos, was meant, in scene after scene, to impress the audience as comic, can we begin to understand the theatrical intention of Shakspere's tragedy.' Edgar's assumed madness and the half-intelligible absurdities of the loving fool might seem ludicrous to an Elizabethan audience of the lower class, but reverence for a king and respect for an old man

and a conviction of the justice of parental authority were natural then, and must have prevented Lear from seeming comic even to the most thoughtless. The antics of the others only serve to bring out his dignity more forcibly, and the reality of his suffering must have been as evident to a seventeenth-century audience as it is to us.

Throughout the book Professor Wendell carries the idea that the reality and vividness of the characters constitute the great charm of the plays. They are so real that they make us accept without question the romantic situations in which they are placed and the impossible or fanciful stories in which they are the actors. Of *As You Like It* he says:—

When people live for us as Rosalind lives and Celia and Orlando and the Duke and Jaques and Touchstone and Andrey, we accept them as facts; and with them we accept whatever else their existence involves. What makes *As You Like It* live, then, is the spontaneous ease with which Shakespeare's creative imagination translated conventional types into living individuals.

This is undoubtedly true. We are apt to think that the attraction of the plays is due to the poetry, the wit, or the phrases of supreme and final excellence; but when we reflect we will conclude that it is mainly due to the fact that these things are said by interesting individuals. There is plenty of wit in Sheridan's comedies, but we rarely re-read them because the speakers are theatrical puppets, not human beings. We find, too, that we are drawn to those of our acquaintances who take their own views and express them in their own language, rather than to those who may be more intelligent or learned but are immersed in an intellectual reticence which prevents them from disclosing their natures. We take great pleasure sometimes in the company

of persons, rather stupid perhaps, but to whom the popular expression, 'You always know where to find them,' is naturally applied. Shakespeare's characters are consistent, sometimes conventional like Osric, sometimes complex like Hamlet, but always intelligible sources of speech and action, whether in an enchanted island or in a London tavern, and we as human beings are drawn to them. On reading *Every Man in his Humour* or *King or no King*, we find no such attraction, though we do find a neatly constructed and well-told story.

Professor Wendell is inclined to give Shakespeare little credit for inventive or original constructive power. There is truth in this, too. He declares, 'Among mendacious proverbs few are so completely false as that which declares Shakespeare never to repeat; it were truer to say that he rarely did much else if he could help it.' But this proverb — if there be such a one — refers to repetition of phraseology, not to repetition of situation. Disguise and mistakes of identity are familiar devices of all playwrights, and you cannot have a modern play without a 'love interest.' The events of life are not endless, though they may be endlessly combined and colored. But the number of individuals is endless, and Shakespeare never repeats a character, though some of the earlier ones may be suggestions of later ones. Biron is more than a water-color of Benedick, and each of Shakespeare's women is herself alone. The saying is true if we apply it to form. Consider Portia addressing the Jew on mercy, and Isabella addressing Angelo on the same theme. Hamlet and Claudio both speak of death and the unknown hereafter, without the repetition of a single figure or turn of phrase. The subject treated in *Lucrece* (lines 688 to 700) is the subject of Sonnet 129. The parallelism ends with the subject. Shakespeare repeated the consideration

of certain phases of human nature, but always from a different standpoint. Professor Wendell says that Shakespeare was ‘economical of invention,’ and that he is ‘remarkable among dramatists for persistent repetition of whatever had once proved dramatically effective.’ This certainly applies to the comedies only, for the four great tragedies show no ‘economy of invention,’ but are independently developed each from a mere germ of legend or story.

We cannot follow Professor Wendell in his theory that ‘the character of Cressida has an obvious likeness to that of Cleopatra,’ unless we class all light-o’-loves together ; and still less when he says that ‘the character of Cressida has an equal and less generally recognized likeness to that of Desdemona.’ These two are antipodal because they differ *toto cælo* in the most important part of character, the instinctive conception of love. The one is a fascinating wanton, the other a wife. As the author says, ‘both are untruthful’ ; but Cressida’s untruthfulness is radical, whereas Desdemona prevaricates about the handkerchief because she is frightened by her husband. There are very few women, or men either, who would dare to tell an unwelcome truth to Othello when he was angry. It was not necessary for Professor Wendell to sustain his theory that at one period of his life Shakespeare was deeply impressed by the fact that love, the source of happiness, might also be the cause of misery and ruin, that good and evil are bound up in it as they are in the constitution of the world, by assuming that at one time Shakespeare regarded all women as untruthful, or at least unreliable.

Professor Wendell concludes that —

Shakspere’s artistic development from beginning to end was perfectly normal . . . that his two most marked traits

as an artist are both unmistakable and persistent; from beginning to end he displayed a habit of mind which made less distinction than is generally conceivable between words and concepts for which they stand; and his imaginative power, in many aspects unlimited, always exerted itself chiefly in matters of detail — most of all in the creation of uniquely individual characters. In mere invention, in what is vulgarly called originality and what really means instinctive straying from fact, he was weaker than hundreds of lesser men.

When the term invention is limited in this way all will agree with him. It is not easy to see precisely what he means by 'less distinction than is usual between words and concepts.' If he means a rapid assimilation of a word in all its associations, that which is ordinarily called language power or perception of values, he is undoubtedly right; and, as language is the criterion of the difference between man and brute, he gives Shakespeare preëminence in the highest human attribute. He might have noticed also his perception of the musical values of words, and noted how this developed in the poet.

His book is full of thought, and provocative of thought in the reader. It is at once scholarly and marked by common sense, and if it invites criticism it is because it is not a repetition of conventional views.

#### MR. FREDERICK G. FLEAY

Historical research was prosecuted in the latter part of the nineteenth century with great pertinacity, principally by the members of the New Shakespearean Society. Halliwell-Phillipps, in *Outlines of a Life of Shakespeare*, published many documents, some of which bear remotely on the subject. Mr. Fleay, in his *Life and Work of Shakespeare* (1886), gathered every scrap of information concerning theatrical matters in the period

that could be gleaned. In his Manual he presented the results of tabulation of the various forms of verse in the plays of Shakespeare and others. His industry was phenomenal. For example, on page 154 of his *Shakespeare Manual* he gives a list of thirty-two plays by Fletcher and Massinger, in which he has counted the number of double-ending lines, rhyming lines, Alexandrines, and short lines, and computed the averages of each. On pages 135 and 136 he gives a complete metrical analysis of forty-four plays, including all of Shakespeare's, the doubtful plays, and the first sketches in early quartos. These are tabulated under fifteen heads. It is hardly possible to appreciate the plodding labor necessary to the production of these comparative tables, which represent but a small fraction of his work. He upholds frankly the rigid scientific method, and says: 'The great need for any critic who attempts to use these tests' (the weak-ending test, the pause-test, etc., which imply some æsthetic sense), 'is to have had a thorough training in the natural sciences, especially in Mineralogy, classificatory Botany, and *above all in chemical analysis.*' As Touchstone says, 'Thus men may grow wiser every day; it is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies.'

Had Mr. Fleay's training in natural sciences been more thorough, he would have learned that tabulation of observations is one thing and drawing general conclusions another, depending on different faculties. He would have refrained from hasty and fanciful generalizations both from historical facts and from metrical tables, or at least have been more cautious in his hypotheses. To assert that *Twelfth Night* shows clear evidence of having been written in two parts at different times, and dovetailed together at a later period, is to ignore the laws that observation shows govern the

production of a unified work of art. He writes of the plays of contemporary satire of the Elizabethan period, like *Wily Beguiled*, the *Poetaster*, *Satiro-Mastix*, etc.:—

I have ascertained by induction from several plays of this class, that when the lover indicates a dramatic author, his mistress signifies the company of players for whom he writes, her father is the manager of the company, and marriage signifies his binding himself to write for them.

This is discovering a mare's nest and attempting to hatch the wind eggs placed there by the finder. Nevertheless, we owe Mr. Fleay and the new Shakespeare Society a debt — and no small one — for making clear and definite, as far as may be, the changes in Shakespeare's *formal style*, for this bears on the development of his poetic powers.

#### MR. SIDNEY LEE

Mr. Sidney Lee's *Life of William Shakespeare*, 1898, both in the original and in the condensed form,— *Shakespeare's Life and Work*, 1900,— combines all the good qualities. Both are historical criticism, written by one who appreciates the value of the subject-matter. They are written in the judicial spirit — the spirit not only of a judge, but of a great judge who has listened to the evidence in hundreds of cases, till he has become familiar with the laws of proof, the bearing of documents on the point at issue, and the deceptions the human mind imposes upon itself in considering circumstances bearing on a question of interest. An historian must take interest in the facts he investigates, otherwise he is simply a compiler.<sup>1</sup> But this interest immediately arouses the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Furnivall's introduction to the *Leopold Shakespeare* is characterized by the same industry in gathering facts and forming tables, and the same ignoring of relative values.

imagination to form a picture of persons and their surroundings, for the details of which there may be little warrant, and which may be colored by knowledge of a later and different phase of society. Few can read of Shakespeare coming to London and becoming author and playwright, without involuntarily reproducing the situation. The life and vividness of the plays compels this interest in the man. But unless the writer has immense knowledge of literary history and a trained judgment, his picture will be largely subjective, and then he will force the facts to fit the judgment. Mr. Lee is free from this tendency, partly from natural habit of mind, but largely from his long training on the *Dictionary of National Biography*, where Mr. Leslie Stephen insisted on a lawyer-like sifting of evidence and careful discrimination between fact and deduction. In consequence of this and of an inborn love of literature, Mr. Lee's book leaves nothing to be desired and is indispensable to the student. These qualities are particularly evident in his discussion of the sonnets, which, on account of their poetic force, have excited so many commentators to step beyond criticism into conjecture and creation. Unless some significant document is discovered, it is difficult to believe that anything of importance can be added to our knowledge of Shakespeare's life.

Mr. Lee's delightful collection of essays, *Shakespeare and the Modern Stage*, bear out this estimate.

Professor Lounsbury's three volumes, grouped under the general head of *Shakespearean Wars*, are a monument of careful and discriminating research and give us a right to claim one of the great historical critics, as Dr. Furness's Variorum Edition gives us a right to claim one of the great editors. Professor Lounsbury's volumes throw a great deal of light on the progress of critical opinion during the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, and, if carried out with the minute care that has characterized them hitherto, will constitute a veritable history of Shakespearean criticism. His investigations into the conduct of Pope and Voltaire give us a new conception of the possibilities of literary jealousy and of the rage that can possess poetic minds. His books are so entertainingly written that a student is apt to overlook the amount of research given to unearthing the facts. To pounce upon the interesting and significant statements in a mass of unreadable periodicals and to present them in their 'true colors and just extent' is the task of the trained historian of literary powers, and is well accomplished in *Shakespearean Wars*.

#### THE ESSAYS

The essays on various points of Shakespearean criticism and historical research are almost innumerable. Fifty-two belonging to the first quarter of the nineteenth century were collected by Nathan Drake in *Memorials of Shakespeare*, including some by Coleridge, Campbell, and Schlegel. Of the first half of the century, those by Carlyle in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Emerson in *Representative Men*, and Lowell's *Shakespeare Once More* are among the most notable. The first two consist of general philosophical reflections on the function of the poet, and Shakespeare is rather an illustration than the subject of critical examination. Carlyle says, 'The poet we may call a revealer of what we are to love.' 'A German critic says that "the poet has an infinitude in him," he communicates a certain character of infinitude to whatever he delineates. This, though not very precise, yet in so vague a matter is worth remembering; if well meditated, some meaning can be found in it. For my own part I find considerable meaning in the old vulgar dis-

tinction of poetry being *metrical*, having music in it, being a song. Truly if pressed to give a definition one might say this as soon as anything else.' 'The best judgment, not of this country only, but of Europe at large, is slowly pointing to the conclusion that Shakespeare is the chief of all Poets hitherto ; the greatest intellect who in our recorded world has left record of himself in literature.'

He finds Shakespeare's power in his 'calmly seeing eye,' he looks unconsciously into the heart of things—

Or indeed we may say again it is in what I called portrait-painting, delineating of men and things, especially of men, that Shakespeare is great. It is unexampled, I think, that calm creative perspicacity of Shakespeare. The thing he looks at reveals not this or that face of it, but its inmost heart and generic secret ; it dissolves itself as in light before him, so that he discerns the perfect structure of it. No twisted, poor convex concave mirror reflecting all objects with its own convexities and concavities, a perfectly level mirror—that is to say, withal, if we will perfectly understand it a man justly related to all things and men, a good man. It is truly a lordly spectacle how this great soul takes in all kinds of men and objects, a Falstaff, an Othello, a Juliet, a Coriolanus, sets them all forth to us in their rounded completeness ; loving, just, the equal brother of all. *Novum Organum*, and all the intellect you will find in Bacon, is of quite a secondary order ; earthy, material, poor in comparison with this.

Carlyle recognizes, what critics have not always done, that Shakespeare wrote for the theatre.

Passages there are that come upon you like splendor out of heaven ; bursts of radiance, illuminating the very heart of the thing ; you say, 'that is true, spoken once and for ever ; wheresoever and whensoever there is an open human soul that will be recognized as true.' Such bursts, however, make us feel that the surrounding matter is not radiant ; that

it is in part temporary, conventional. Alas, Shakespeare had to write for the Globe Playhouse, his great soul had to crush itself, as it could, into that and no other world. It was with him as with us all. No man works save under conditions.

That last is a truth that Carlyle did not always recognize as cheerfully as his friend Emerson, whose essay, if not so vigorous as Carlyle's, is more temperate. As in his chapter on Montaigne, he makes the name the starting-point of a discourse on skepticism and belief and indifference, so Shakespeare suggests to him that a poet is the voice of his age, Shakespeare's being an age full of folklore and agitated by important religious and philosophical questions, and particularly fortunate in that the people loved the drama. Dr. Garnett says rightly that 'Emerson is incapable of contemplating Shakespeare with the eye of the dramatic critic.' This is true, for the morbid seriousness of the Puritan, which regards this world as probationary and joy as an impertinence and beauty as a trifle, was not entirely eradicated from his mind. He says: —

Shakespeare employed them [the material things of the earth, trees, clouds, fields] as colors to compose his picture. He rested in their beauty ; and never took the step which seemed inevitable to such genius, namely to explore the virtue which resides in these symbols and imparts this power. . . . He was master of the revels to mankind. Is it not as if one should have, through majestic powers of science, the comets given into his hand, or the planets and their moons, and should draw them from their orbits to glare with the municipal fireworks on a holiday night, and advertise in all towns, 'Very superior pyrotechny this evening.' . . . As long as the question is of talent and mental power, the world of men has not his equal to show. But when the question is, to life and its materials and its auxiliaries, how does he profit me ? What does it signify ? It is but a Twelfth Night,

or *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, or *Winter Evening's Tale*. What signifies another picture more or less? . . . This man of men, he who gave to the science of mind a new and larger subject than had ever existed, and planted the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into Chaos,—that he should not be wise for himself;—it must even go into the world's history that the best poet led an obscure and profane life, using his genius for the public amusement.

The essayist says that other men, ‘priest and prophet, Israelite, German, and Swede,’ beheld the same objects, but they also saw through them that which they contained,—

And to what purpose? The beauty straightway vanished; they read commandments, all-excluding mountainous duty; an obligation, a sadness, as of piled mountains, fell on them, and life became ghastly, joyless, a pilgrim's progress, a probation, beleaguered round with doleful histories of Adam's fall and curse behind us; with doomsdays and purgatorial and penal fires before us; and the heart of the seer and the heart of the listener sank in them. It must be conceded that these are half-views of half-men. The world still wants its poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle, with Shakespeare the player, nor shall grope in graves, with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall see, speak, and act, with equal inspiration.

The seriousness of Shakespeare's tragedies is too well understood now to make it worth while to comment on Mr. Emerson's strictures. His are the views of the poet who loves beautiful phrases, looking through the spectacles of the philosopher who worships righteousness. The essay abounds in delicate literary appreciations. He goes to the play: ‘The recitation begins: one golden word leaps out immortal from all this painted pedantry and *sweetly torments us with invitations to its own inaccessible home*.’ ‘There is in all

cultivated minds a silent appreciation of his superlative power and beauty, which, like Christianity, qualifies the period.' The 'golden word' or phrase he refers to is 'glimpses of the moon' in the lines of Hamlet to the ghost:—

What may this mean,  
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel  
Revisit'st thus the *glimpses of the moon*, —

words which at once reduce the big reality of the world to phantasmal twilight in the hearer's imagination. But those words are beautiful because they cohere in the structure of the entire scene, and are the utterance of a young man under stress of emotion. But even if Mr. Emerson confines himself too closely to the literary man's standpoint, the worship of the phrase, we find his sentence as exhilarating as if Shakespeare himself had penned it.

#### LOWELL

Mr. Lowell's essay, *Shakespeare Once More*, is longer than those of his illustrious predecessors. Coming later in the century (1868), it is free from the transcendental tone of the criticism of the earlier period—reflected from German philosophy—and is governed by the spirit of common sense which the scientific method was impressing on the writings of the age. Written, however, by a poet and a scholarly man of letters, it is entirely free from the bald realism which science sometimes imposes on literary research. It ranges over a great variety of topics from the inner life of the Elizabethan period, the flexibility and vigor of the language, the printing of the folio, the character of the poet, and the character of Hamlet. This discursiveness gives the essay a conversational charm, which is exceedingly

attractive. The abounding wit sometimes withdraws attention from the question discussed; but if this be a fault it compensates for itself by its own exceeding ingenuity and nimbleness. Mr. Lowell calls attention to this very thing in Shakespeare:—

I am ready to grant that Shakespeare sometimes allows his characters to spend time, that might be better employed, in carving some cherry-stone of a quibble; that he is sometimes tempted away from the natural by the quaint; that he sometimes forces a partial, even a verbal analogy between the abstract thought and the sensual image into an absolute identity, giving us a serious pun.

Mr. Lowell's puns and verbal conceits are far better than Shakespeare's, for they always illustrate the thought; but they sometimes assume a familiarity with literature and literary anecdotes in the reader, not general now, though possibly Mr. Lowell was justified in assuming it in his generation. It is possible that Mr. Lowell is wrong in referring to Ophelia's words as 'the piteous "no more, but so!"'<sup>1</sup> in which Ophelia compresses the heart-break whose compression was to make her mad,' for the words are addressed to her brother at a time when she is resting secure in the consciousness that Hamlet has 'importuned her with love in honorable fashion.' The heart-break is expressed in the words, 'I was the more deceived,' in reply to Hamlet's 'I loved you not,' spoken long after, when at her father's command she had denied for two weeks her maiden presence to her lover. This error is but a trifling matter.

Mr. Lowell ranges over so many topics that it is impossible to summarize. The distinction he makes be-

<sup>1</sup> These words are followed in F. by an interrogation mark, which would mark them as arch. Some critics prefer to omit it, but even so, the girl's next speech shows that she is not alarmed.

tween the Greek conception of fate and Shakespeare's of character as a cause, is summed up in the sentence, 'Generally it may be said that with the Greeks the character is involved in the action' (helpless, powerless), 'while with Shakespeare the action is evolved from the character.'

Of the costuming and setting he says they should be 'in keeping,' first historically as far as is possible, and secondly intrinsically, so as to make a 'harmony with the total impression.' He criticises John Kemble for dressing Macbeth in a modern Highland costume, not because it 'wounds the antiquarian conscience,' but because it 'wounds the poetic conscience.'<sup>1</sup> Hamlet he regards as so intellectual a person, so given to moralizing on every situation and reducing motives and duty to general propositions, as to have no energy left for action. He thinks that the prince sees both sides so clearly, and has so remarkable a gift for language, that he is taken up in comparing them, and can never decide which is so far the best as to call for instant action.

[His irony] is the half-jest, half-earnest of an inactive temperament, that has not quite made up its mind whether life is a reality or no, whether men were not made in jest, and which amuses itself equally with finding a deep meaning in trivial things and a trifling one in the profoundest mysteries of being, because the want of earnestness in its own essence infects everything else with its own indifference.

If we accede to this, and perhaps we must, we may at least remember the peculiar circumstances in which Hamlet is placed, and his antecedent history and education, which so intensify the shock of the ghost's disclosure. Mr. Lowell puts aside firmly the hypothesis that

<sup>1</sup> The entire passage on the subject of antiquarian truth is admirable.

Hamlet is insane, because a crazy man could not be the hero of a tragedy. He knows that an intellectual man of vivid imagination and high-strung emotional temperament may appear insane in mental distress. Of the play he well says:—

Whether I have fancied anything into Hamlet which the author never dreamed of putting there, I do not greatly concern myself to inquire. . . . Praise art as we will, that which the artist did not mean to put into his work, but which found itself there by some generous process of Nature of which he was as unaware as the blue river is of its rhyme with the blue sky, has somewhat in it that snatches us into sympathy with higher things than those which come by plot and observation. . . . Without foremeaning it, [Goethe] impersonated in Mephistopheles the genius of his century. . . . I believe that Shakespeare intended to impersonate in Hamlet, not a mere metaphysical entity, but a man of flesh and blood, yet it is certainly curious how prophetically typical the character is of that introversion of mind which is so constant a phenomenon of these latter days, of that over-consciousness which wastes itself in analyzing the motives of action instead of acting.

Is it certain that the Hamlet type is more common now than it was in 1600? The skeptic, who instinctively asks of life ‘What is all this worth?’ is a product of all civilizations. Without him there would not be much besides material progress. Undoubtedly Shakespeare drew what he saw and what he divined in the men around him, and his characters were contemporaneously typical rather than ‘prophetically typical.’ Neither Shakespeare nor Mr. Lowell could take out of their brains more than their ancestors and their observation and their education had put in, though it may seem to us that both had an unfair advantage over us in some ‘affable familiar ghost that nightly gulled them with intelligence.’

**MILES**

The *Review of Hamlet* by George Henry Miles, first printed in the *Southern Review*, 1870, and published in a volume of eighty-eight pages, is a thoughtful examination of the play. The writer combats very successfully the Schlegel-Coleridge-Goethe hypothesis that Hamlet was a weakling, a sentimentalist, staggering beneath the weight of a duty he is constitutionally incapable of performing. In this he anticipates Swinburne and Bradley. Hamlet in his view is a cynic. ‘With too much wisdom,’ he says, ‘Hamlet had lost all trust in his mother; and when we cease to trust our mothers, we cease to trust humanity.’ Mr. Miles considers it not unnatural that Hamlet should refrain from killing his uncle when he finds him praying. This desire to kill his enemy when his condition was such that he would incur damnation has always been a stumbling-block to critics, who regard it as indicating a fiendish refinement of malice; but granting, as why should we not, that Hamlet really believed that if his uncle died in the act of prayer he would be received into an eternity of happiness, and granting, too, that Hamlet was glad to grasp at an excuse, the delay seems natural enough. Hamlet’s duty is revenge, which for the moment is unattainable. It is not so easy to follow Mr. Miles in his declaration that Hamlet planned beforehand his recapture by the ‘pirate of very warlike appointment,’ nor to see that the monologue in the third scene of the fourth act,—‘How all occasions do inform against me and spur my dull revenge,’—is not only superfluous and contradictory, but absurd unless Hamlet planned the subsequent ‘piratical recapture.’ This strong soliloquy is not in the folio, but it casts a great light on Hamlet’s character, especially in the lines:—

I do not know

Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do' ;

Sith I have cause and will and strength and means

To do 't.

Mr. Miles says this is false. 'He had not strength and means to do it, and could not have, until rescued from captivity and impending death by that well-appointed pirate.' But Hamlet did not know at that moment that he was to be executed in England, and he had 'strength and means' as long as he wore a sword, even if he was under arrest.

The essay is full of spirited appreciations :—

Hamlet is not directly on trial for his soul, but the question of eternal loss or gain is constantly suggested. It is the management of this deep sorrow of the world to come ; this sharp contrast between providence and fate ; this complicated war between conscience and passion ; this final appeal from time to eternity, that gives the drama such universal indestructible interest. . . . In Hamlet Shakespeare has not only created a character but a soul.

There are other plays, *Macbeth*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Richard III*, where the forces from the world after death react directly on this present, evil world, but none in which the beyond seems so immanent, nor where the victim is so lovable and interesting, so human and so pathetic.

JOHN CORBIN

Mr. John Corbin's little book, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (1895), may fairly be classed as an 'essay,' indeed, it is so designated in the prefatory letter. Its main thesis is that the 'mad scenes in *Hamlet* had a comic aspect now ignored,' which adhered to them from the original treatment of the story in the first dramatization,—now lost,—and that the traces of this do

something towards explaining the inconsistencies in the character and action of the hero. This is supported by an admirable and temperate argument conducted in the true scientific spirit, in which nothing is exaggerated or suppressed by the wish to uphold the author's position. Every bit of evidence given bears on the point—some of it, indeed, not very heavily, but none is given undue force nor placed on the wrong side of the scale. In fact, the book is a model of historico-literary investigation. Should the lost play, the first *Hamlet*, possibly by Kyd, ever be discovered, it is twenty to one that the first step in the development from the prose *Hystorie* to Shakespeare's play will be found exactly what Mr. Corbin supposes it to have been ; that is, a 'tragedy of blood' combined loosely with comic matter, in which Hamlet's mad talk and action caused the barren spectators to laugh. It is possible that Mr. Corbin makes rather too much of the brutal disposition of seventeenth-century audiences compared to eighteenth-century audiences. There were simple-hearted and compassionate people in England before Uncle Toby, and in Dr. Johnson's day press-gangs, the condition of the penal law, the love of witnessing prize fights and public executions, indicate a public as brutal as any that supported the Elizabethan theatre. Defoe's and Smollett's public cannot have been much in advance of their grandfathers'. But, however this be regarded, it cannot be denied that the theatre-goers of the early seventeenth century delighted in spectacles of blood, that they regarded a crazy person as an object of derision and a cause of mirth rather than pity, and that the pre-Shakespearean dramatic presentation of such motives has left faint traces in Shakespeare's handling of similar themes, though his justice of perception and warm humanity made tragically pathetic what had been and perhaps

was at his time regarded as mirth-provoking. Mr. Corbin presents this in a way no student can afford to overlook. Especially philosophical is his remark: ‘My personal opinion is that Shakespeare’s audiences were quite capable of *feeling strongly and simultaneously* both the archaic comedy and the enduring tragedy of the scene’ (the nunnery scene in *Hamlet*). It is not quite clear whether he means that the audience as a unit took the scene in both ways ‘simultaneously,’ or whether different individuals were thrilled or amused; probably the latter, though the first is by no means impossible, as any one will admit who has noticed the contest between pity and amusement excited in his own mind by occurrences at once distressing and absurd.

Mr. Corbin’s admirable study recognizes that, after all, the important thing is not Hamlet as he appeared to the audiences of 1603, but the Hamlet that has been built up by thousands of interpretations by great actors and critics. He says:—

Each actor and critic has divined new traits of beauty, and generations have so loved the gentleness of the Prince, that in the light of their love the brutal facts of many of the scenes in which he moves are glorified. The modern Hamlet is the true Hamlet. In the truest sense of the word he is the Shakespearean Hamlet; and will continue so, until new ages shall add new beauties to our interpretation.

Ordinarily, the disciple of the modern school would ignore the psychical Hamlet, the product of so much reflection and traditional love, as something fanciful and incomprehensible, and insist on the original conception as the only veritable one. Mr. Corbin recognizes that an art-product, though unchangeable in its outward form as it left its creator’s hand, has an existence in the general consciousness which develops like a living thing or

languishes and dies. Frequently scientific research treats the dead body and the living one with the same respect because unconscious of the difference, but Mr. Corbin adds to the spirit of exact investigation a comprehension of what constitutes literary value,—life in the minds of the people. This gives his essay an almost unique worth.

#### STOLL

A typical example of scientific treatment of a critical question is to be found in the paper of Mr. E. E. Stoll in the June (1907) number of *Modern Language Notes*. The thesis is that the ghosts in Shakespeare's plays are not subjective ghosts, figments of the excited brains of criminals and the outcome of mental states, but, in the conception of the artist and the perception of the Elizabethan audience, veritable visitants from the supernatural world. The question is not, did Shakespeare himself believe in ghosts, but did he write in the full consciousness that his audience did believe in their reality, and therefore intend his ghosts to be taken as veritable?

About the ghost of Hamlet's father there can be no question. It appears to four persons, and it speaks. The consciences of the guardsmen who see it first are not burdened. The ghost is almost one of the *dramatis personæ*. None of Shakespeare's ghosts do anything; there is no such absurdity as in the German *Hamlet*, where the ghost gives the soldier a box on the ear. The fairies, Oberon, Puck, and Ariel, act in accordance with their imagined characters as developed in folklore. The Harpies in *The Tempest* carry off the banquet and the phantom dogs bite the drunken conspirators and make them 'roar.' Shakespeare's ghosts are also true to the belief of the time. They appear to the doomed man before his death, or in the fulfillment of a

curse ; they are the ghosts of popular superstition, and therefore not projections of a guilty conscience.

The crucial instance is Banquo's ghost. Professor Bradley, in a note, suggests that this may be an hallucination. Macbeth is highly imaginative. He has already seen the air-borne dagger. He calls the ghost an 'unreal mockery.' It vanishes when he recovers self-possession. He alone sees it. It is therefore an illusion, as the dagger was.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Stoll combats this conclusion successfully. Dr. Forman's diary shows that the 'blood-boltered Banquo' was represented on Shakespeare's stage by a real actor, supposed to be visible to Macbeth and the audience, but not to the rest of the actors. From the day of Homer goddesses and ghosts have had the power of being visible to one person only. We have as much right to say that Macbeth recovers self-possession when the ghost *proprio motu* vanishes as that he causes the illusion to disappear by an effort of his will.

As to Cæsar's ghost, there would seem to be even less question that Shakespeare intended the audience to take it for a real ghost, for it speaks. In the Elizabethan audience the greater number believed in the

<sup>1</sup> It is a mark of scientific criticism to be absolutely fair. Mr. Stoll is not entirely so to Professor Bradley. He does not mention that the discussion is contained in a note and is merely suggestive. He finds fault with him for adducing the argument that the ghost is visible only to Macbeth, but omits Professor Bradley's remark, 'I should attach no weight to' (that point) 'taken alone,' and his reference to the page where he asserts that the ghost of Hamlet's father was meant to be taken as real. Finally, he omits Professor Bradley's summary :—

'On the whole, and with some doubt, I think that Shakespeare (1) meant the judicious to take the ghost (Banquo's) for an hallucination, but (2) knew that the bulk of the audience would take it for a reality. And I am more sure of (2) than of (1).'

When a man of straw is set up, he should not be labeled with the name of the first modern critic.

reality of ghosts, and if there were any skeptics they were ready to yield temporarily to the emotion of the crowd. In fact, even now many of us are willing to set aside for the moment our convictions in favor of our imaginings when we witness a Shakespearean play. We enjoy the make-believe and are thrilled by the sight of a theatrical ghost if ushered in by the master, though we have not the slightest belief in the appearance of disembodied spirits. The Elizabethan audience was of course far more susceptible than we.

When ghosts or spirits appear in a dream, and when they are represented on the stage by real actors who move and speak, as in *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*, it would seem as if they must be subjective, and must stand for figures of the dreamer's imagination, since he can neither hear nor see. Mr. Stoll will hardly admit this. He says, 'It may be that Shakespeare meant that the ghosts (in *Richard III*) should be no more than a dream, no more than pangs of conscience.' 'But even so our thesis stands, for he has not succeeded. They are objective still. Not only do the ghosts tread the stage and lift up their voices, but—unmistakable immemorial token—the lights burn blue. Moreover, at the same time these ghosts appear and prophesy to Richmond, and by him, too, are recognized as the souls of the bodies which Richard murdered.' This last goes far to prove that Shakespeare did not regard the ghosts as emanations of Richard's guilty conscience, but as the veritable spirits of the dead, though appearing in a vision. A modern playwright—for example, the author of the *Bells*—conceives the dream of Matthias as subjective strictly, and is careful to present nothing which might interfere with such an interpretation. He would never represent two men seeing the same sleeping vision.

The spirits in *Henry VIII* appear before the sleeping Queen and ‘hold the garland over her head.’ She ‘makes in her sleep signs of rejoicing, and holdeth up her hands to heaven.’ The celestial visitants are not visible to her servants. They can hardly be held to represent merely creations of the imagination of the dying woman. They are good angels sent from heaven to comfort her, and were so regarded by the audience and intended to be so regarded by the author. They are stage representations of real beings, at least beings considered actual in the seventeenth century.

Did the poet regard them as such, or was he simply playing on popular beliefs? As Mr. Stoll says:—

Did Shakespeare then believe in these things, in the supernatural character and significance of portents and omens, prophecies and presentiments, dreams, magic, curses, witches, ghosts? So much as that we must not, need not here undertake to prove: it is the implication and corollary of all that we have proved. As did his fellow playwrights, he represented ghosts, witches, omens, dreams, and the like always as simply as if he believed in them, and his belief there is no more reason to question than theirs.

It would be difficult to prove how far intelligent men believe in popular superstitions at any time. Poets, especially, take up the symbols of a faith and invest them with esoteric meaning; they penetrate beyond the creed to the verities and powers, a dim perception of which led men to formulate the creed or invent the myth. Everything is symbolic to them. Witches, or ghosts, or legendary history, or folklore, they believe in all for the purpose of envisaging life. Shakespeare does not disclose his personal belief, but addresses himself to the public mind with a full knowledge of its superstitions, and an instinct how they might be used parabolically

and harmoniously with their nature and source. Apparently he shared the idea, inherited from Romanism, that occupation and mental condition at the moment of death affected powerfully fate after death; for he puts into the mouth of his most intelligent and skeptical character the words, ‘This is hire and salary, not revenge’; to kill my uncle praying, that is, would be a very ineffectual way and would carry out the words, not the spirit, of my father’s command, to send my uncle to eternal bliss. ‘In our circumstance and course of thought ’t is heavy with him’ (his father). Hamlet believed this; why not Shakespeare, too, as most of the men of his time did? And if Shakespeare believed that, why should he not believe in the reality and frequent visitation of disembodied spirits as far as other intelligent men of his day? Of course we can say that Hamlet grasped at this as a formal excuse for procrastination, but he must have had some sort of a belief in the dogma in order to deceive himself. But, on the other hand, we find the poet putting into the mouth of the wicked man the rational argument that justice must rule in the future life and no quibbling will avail:—

There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
In his true nature.

Evidently, Shakespeare’s religious belief cannot be inferred from the words of his dramatic characters.

Mr. Stoll fails to note, what Mr. Corbin fully comprehends, that the original intention of the author and the sense in which the Elizabethan audience took representations of supernatural beings, though interesting if they could be definitely established and rendered comprehensible to modern understanding, are of very little consequence in comparison with the plays themselves, enriched as they are by æsthetic interpretation for two

centuries and by the love and interest of the descendants of the men for whom they were written. Did Raphael paint merely a woman and a mother, or did he expect those who viewed his picture to regard it as a portrait of a veritable Queen of Heaven? The question is of the same nature as the subject of Mr. Stoll's paper. Shakespeare's ghosts conform to Elizabethan superstition in externals; but it is far more important that they conform in essentials to moral differences. Banquo's ghost is quite as true if interpreted symbolically to be a picture projected so vividly by a guilty conscience as to seem real to the guilty man, as if it be considered a veritable spirit, no 'unreal mockery,' but the actual presentment of the bloody corpse of the murdered man. It is a property of great poetry to use the conventions of the day in order to express lasting truths, and to mean more and more as time goes on. Shakespeare's ghosts have an artistic function not confined to the seventeenth century. In fact, they are as impressive as they were then, perhaps more so, though they do not appeal to the same popular mind. Otherwise Shakespeare would be of the age, not for all time.

## CHAPTER XII

### CRITICISM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

**DR. A. C. BRADLEY**

DR. BRADLEY's *Shakespearean Tragedy* is the most notable piece of literary criticism that has appeared since the day of Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt. It combines the enthusiasm and vision of the romanticists with the common sense and exactness of the scientific method. Though confined to the four great tragedies, it is packed so full of meaning that no brief review can give an idea of its value. In the introduction the author restricts the ground by declaring, 'Nothing will be said of Shakespeare's place in the history of English literature or of the drama in general; questions concerning his life and character I shall leave untouched. Even the poetry in the restricted sense, the beauties of style, diction, versification will be merely glanced at.' 'The object is to learn to apprehend the action and some of the personages with a somewhat greater truth and intensity.' But Dr. Bradley's mastery of the parts of the general subject he does not discuss, is so full and adequate as to give his treatment a justice and weight not often reached by the specialist. It is felt as a substratum of his thought, and colors much of what he says, and prevents his view from ever becoming extreme or one-sided. His familiarity with the fundamentals of human nature makes his analysis of the complicated natures of the Shakespearean characters convincing to the common sense of the modern reader.

The first lecture (the matter of the book was first made public in lectures at Glasgow, Liverpool, and Oxford,—the writer is Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and consequently retains a tone of personal address and the formal divisions of the university lecture) is on the ‘substance of Shakespeare’s Tragedy.’ This is a philosophical examination of the question, What is a tragic action? or, rather, ‘What is the nature of the tragic aspect of life as represented by Shakespeare?’ In answering this the writer, naturally, builds upon Aristotle’s analysis, but the superstructure is worth at least as much as the foundation. He defines a tragedy to be ‘a story of exceptional calamity tending to the death of a man in high estate.’ The actions proceed from character, and, in the Shakespeare tragedy, the effect of chance or accident is minimized. It enters the action much as it enters human life, capriciously modifying the effect of free will, but not as the prominent, controlling influence. Thus it is due to chance that the gracious Duncan enters Macbeth’s castle just as ‘the thought whose murder yet is but fantastical’ was ready to take possession of the minds of his hosts; that Hamlet is brought back to Denmark by the pirates, that Desdemona drops the handkerchief at the fatal moment, that the letter of Edmund is too late to save the life of Cordelia; but these accidents modify only slightly the course of events, the controlling influence is the will and characters of men and women. The interest of the play never depends upon the unravelling of a complicated plot any more than it does on the happening of lucky or unlucky events. The story is a conflict,—not only between two groups representing good and evil, in which the hero is representative of one side, but there is also the conflict in the mind of the hero. To make this striking, the hero

need not be good, but he must be great, and capable of profound feeling. Such an emotional nature as that of a Shakespearean hero when thoroughly aroused can express itself, and its struggles and suffering can be represented, only by poetry of the highest order. This poetry overflows and becomes the atmosphere of the play, and affects the utterance of the lesser characters, so that the Queen, Horatio, Ophelia, Banquo, Kent, Ludovico, even the 'first' and 'second gentleman,' may express themselves properly in figurative and rhythmical language. No other form can impress upon us the agony or the joy of great souls. But the tragic conflict as conceived by Shakespeare is not the good man striving against fate, which, as in the Greek tragedies, has a spite against him or his family and insists that he expiate the sins of his grandfather. The ultimate power outside of man, which, 'represented in terms of the understanding, is our imaginative and emotional experience in reading the plays,' is not to be interpreted in religious language as God or Providence, nor as either malicious or beneficent. It is 'something piteous, fearful, and mysterious; but the tragic representation of it does not leave us crushed, rebellious, or desperate.' It is 'the moral order,' a world beyond our experience, in which evil (using the word in its broadest sense) sometimes seems predominant and victorious. It is not a blind fate or a blank necessity, still less is it a world in which justice ultimately triumphs, but one in which evil works out in time its own destruction and that of its agents, involving, however, also the good who are swept up into its maleficent march in the same destruction. The feeling evoked in us by the Shakespearean tragic spectacle is sorrow, awe, even terror, but not a pessimistic despair. This chapter not only brings out the remarkable reach and justness of

Shakespeare's fundamental thought, but it furnishes a reasonable philosophy of life to those who are 'perplexed in the extreme' by the superficial aspects of the world. We cannot say that Shakespeare had consciously formulated the profound conclusions it presents, but that they are rightly deducible from his tragedies there can be no doubt. It establishes his title as supreme poet on a far higher plane than qualities of versification or technical construction. The sensibility of the poet to beauty passes over, in its highest development, to insight into the reality of things. It is then that he becomes 'supreme.'

This profound and serious view of the world, as far from optimism as from despair, is to be gathered from the tragedies. It is, of course, not the only aspect in which the poet regards life. In the romances the question why the innocent and the good should suffer undeservedly is subordinate to the idea of beauty ; the suffering of Imogen is temporary, the injury done to Prospero is righted : in the Comedies and *Midsummer Night's Dream* there is no suffering at all, but the happy hours of youth are viewed with indulgence and sympathy. In the historical plays life is looked at from the point of view of usefulness to society. The practical executive man like Henry V is the hero,—the man who undertakes the duty before him in a straightforward, sensible manner, who intrusts his relations to the unknown to the Church, and whose conscience can be satisfied by building chantries for Richard's soul or by a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Mr. Dowden even thinks that the practical, able man, 'whose large hands mould the world,' who has no doubts, because he is in the hands of God, whose aim is justice, and whose affections are but a subordinate part of his being, is more admirable to Shakespeare than is Hamlet. But every one feels that

the tragedies are more profoundly true and philosophical than the historical plays, and that the conflict they embody is more serious.

Dr. Bradley's next chapter considers the subject of dramatic construction. Here we find the same grasp and the same disregard of wire-drawn distinctions. As the four tragedies only are in question, his generalizations are not subject to so many exceptions as are Freytag's, who tries to deduce rules from Greek, German, and English dramas. Dr. Bradley notes that the exordium or introduction is necessary, and that Shakespeare manages with great skill to mix striking dramatic matter with the narrative or exposition which imparts the situation and introduces the actors to us. Thus in *Hamlet* the ghost excites and interests us, and afterwards we can listen with a sense of relief to the explanation of Horatio, which, if it opened the play, would be awkward, possibly tedious. In *Macbeth* we have the short opening scene of the witches on the blasted heath, 'when the senses and imagination are assaulted by a storm of thunder and supernatural alarm.' This is followed by the scene where the bleeding sergeant relates the occurrences of the battle to the King, in which pure narrative is relieved by the interest excited by the fainting condition of the messenger. The admirable cumulative effect of the rapid entrance of the actors one after another in the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*, and their participation in the street fight, is also noticed by the author. In all the four tragedies, however, the dramatist introduces early a pageant scene, in which a large number of actors participate in a court function, and information is imparted to the audience while their sense of the picturesque is gratified, and their feelings of compassion and interest are not aroused too early. The Court enters in procession in *Hamlet* and

*Lear*, it is gathered about Duncan at the camp near Forres. In *Othello* we have the midnight meeting of the Venetian magnificos, before whom Othello and Desdemona so eloquently rehearse the events which have led up to the situation. These full-dress scenes, alternating with dialogue scenes, relieve the tedium of an exposition evidently intended to put the audience in possession of the antecedent and surrounding circumstances.

After the exposition comes the dramatic conflict, physical as it is between the hero and the embodiment of the opposing force, and psychological as it is in the mind of the hero. It moves forward, sometimes one side and then the other gaining an advantage, but one advancing on the whole to a culmination or crisis. It is in depicting the inward conflict that Shakespeare's power appears; but the 'outward conflict, with its influence on the fortunes of the hero, is the aspect which at first catches, if it does not engross, the attention,' at least, of the ordinary playgoer. In the construction of the outward conflict, or plot proper, Shakespeare is simply a skilled playwright, and no wise superior to several of his contemporaries. Dr. Bradley notices with his usual judgment that 'as the plays vary so much, no simple way of regarding the conflict will answer precisely to the construction of all, and that it sometimes appears possible to look at the construction of a tragedy in two quite different ways.' This readiness to admit the inadequacy of a mechanical theory when applied to a work of art except in the most general way, is a testimony to the author's critical ability, and in direct contrast to those who form a theory and then force each play to fit it.

The author brings out another point, which, though noticed long ago, has never been analyzed with so great skill, and that is, that there is an 'alternation of emotional tension all through the tragedy.' This is com-

mon to all good plays, but is very marked in its regularity in the Shakespearean tragedy. The well-known example is the introduction of the drunken-porter scene immediately after the murder in *Macbeth*. This 'rests on the elementary fact that relief must be given after emotional strain and that contrast is required to bring out the full force of an effect.' The construction of *Othello* Dr. Bradley finds to differ from that of the other tragedies; the introduction is much longer, it is difficult to say which scene is the crisis, and after the conflict is under way there are no pathos scenes or humorous scenes to relieve the emotional tension of the audience, which is increased by stroke after stroke, till in the fourth and fifth acts it becomes almost unendurable.

After an admirable discussion of the question: how far was Shakespeare a conscious artist, scrutinizing and improving his first draft, and how far were his effects unpremeditated,—or, are his great effects due to deliberate work along a scheme or to unconscious tact?—Dr. Bradley considers 'Shakespeare's defects'; for a critic of his calibre must acknowledge that the plays are marked by defects, whether they are due to carelessness or indifference or hurry. That the actions are improbable or strange, as in the opening of *Lear*, is of course a matter of no moment. The old stories were wonderful and strange, that is, they were romantic, and they were dramatized. It would be absurd to look for realistic construction in a story from Geoffrey of Monmouth. The first 'real defect' Dr. Bradley notices is that sometimes Shakespeare strings together a number of short scenes, where he 'flits from one group of characters to another without giving time for each to make a definite impression.' This defect is evident in the latter part of *Macbeth* and the middle part

of *Antony and Cleopatra*. It was made possible by the absence of scenery, but it is not a true dramatic method. It approximates to narrative in short, broken paragraphs.

Second : Shakespeare sometimes introduces 'matter neither required for the plot nor essential to the development of character, e. g., the reference in *Hamlet* to theatre quarrels of the day, the length of the player's speech and of Hamlet's directions to him respecting the delivery of the lines to be inserted in the "Murder of Gonzago.'" These we should be 'sorry to miss, but who can defend it from the point of view of constructive art?' We suppose that Dr. Bradley is right in this, but at least some of the scenes when the dramatist seems for the moment to forget the development of his main theme are necessary to give the audience relief from continuous excitement.

Third: Some of Shakespeare's soliloquies are evidently addressed to the audience, whereas a soliloquy should be a self-disclosure and never used for the purpose of conveying information as to facts, but solely as to psychological conditions. Thus Edgar's soliloquy in *Lear*, II, iii, plainly takes the audience into his confidence. Dr. Bradley does not discuss the question how far the soliloquy and the aside are awkward, in-artistic methods, because he is not discussing dramatic art in general.

Fourth: There are 'inconsistencies and contradictions in many of Shakespeare's plays,' especially as to the lapse of time. It may be observed, however, that these are generally unimportant, and such as could be made clear to the spectator by the actor, who had received directions from the author.

Fifth : Though 'the early critics were often provokingly wrong when they censured the language of par-

ticular passages in Shakespeare as inflated, obscure, tasteless, or "pestered with metaphors," they were surely right in the general statement that his language often shows these faults.'

Sixth: Shakespeare sometimes 'sacrifices dramatic appropriateness to some other object'; as, for instance, the lines of the player King in *Hamlet* on the instability of the human will, or those of the King to Laertes on the same subject are not dramatic, that is, they do not help on the action or disclose to us the nature of the speakers, but they throw a side light on the character of the prince.

Last: Shakespeare was 'fond of gnomic passages,' i.e., general philosophical reflections, frequently rhymed; and introduces them, 'probably not more freely than his readers like, but more freely than, I suppose, a good playwright now would care to do.'

Dr. Bradley discusses these points scientifically, that is, on evidence, not on impressions, and his perception of Shakespeare's shortcomings in no wise diminishes his certainty of Shakespeare's preëminence.

In examining the character of Hamlet, Dr. Bradley disposes of the theories that his delay was due to external difficulties; that he was restrained by conscience or a moral scruple; that he was, as Goethe says, 'a lovely, pure, and most moral nature without the strength of nerve which forms a hero,' and that he was irresolute because of an excess of the reflective or speculative habit of mind, the last being the idea of Coleridge. The critic asks first, what was Hamlet's original character? second, what was the effect on this nature of the events immediately preceding the opening of the play? third, what was the additional effect of the events narrated in the first act? In considering these points the critic bases his argument on lines in the play; he does not

force the lines to support his theory, still less does he ignore parts of the text, as so many of his predecessors had done. In consequence he comes nearer to a rational explanation of Hamlet's character, a definite connection between his nature and his words and acts, than any other critic has done. It is impossible by any epitome to give an adequate idea of his analysis. By temperament he thinks Hamlet 'inclined to nervous instability, to rapid and perhaps extreme changes of mood and feeling'; he possesses 'an exquisite sensibility to which we may give the name moral if the word is taken in the wide meaning it ought to bear.' 'This makes his cynicism, grossness, and hardness appear to us morbidities, and has an inexpressibly attractive and pathetic effect.'

Nothing is to be found elsewhere in Shakespeare, unless in the rage of the disillusioned idealist, Timon, of quite the same kind as Hamlet's disgust at his uncle's drunkenness, his loathing of his mother's sensuality, his astonishment and horror at her shallowness, his contempt for anything pretentious or false, his indifference to everything merely external. . . . With this temper and this sensibility we find, lastly, in the Hamlet of earlier days, as of later, intellectual genius.

This brilliant, sensitive, warm-hearted young man led an active, well-balanced life — 'courtier, scholar, soldier' — till one day his father, whom he had loved and admired and in whose shelter he lived, was found dead in his summer-house. The whole world was changed for the young man, for it now presented to him its most selfish and cruel aspect. His mother soon married his uncle, a man whom he instinctively abhorred. There was nothing for him to respect. He fell into a condition of melancholy — 'dejection, not yet insanity. That Hamlet was not very far from insanity is very probable.' His acuteness of mental vision, enhanced by his un-

happiness, led him to suspect his uncle of the crime. While he was in this mental condition there came in the shape of a message from the other world confirmation of his suspicions and the profoundly shocking assertion of his mother's infidelity. We may regard the ghost as an imaginative presentation of the confirmation of an instinctive presentiment, when little bits of evidence, lying in the mind detached like separate grains of gunpowder, suddenly catch fire one after the other, and the truth stands disclosed for a moment in a lurid glow, never to be forgotten, but incapable of further disclosure. This takes place only in minds in which the unconscious instinctive impulses are strong, and more frequently in women than in men. Coming as it did over this young man in the condition he then was, it left him so far unnerved that for a month or more he did nothing whatsoever, certainly nothing toward avenging his father's death or bringing the murderer to justice. He had fallen in love—not very deeply—with a young girl, the daughter of a state official, and during this time tried to see her; but she, in obedience to her father, refused to see him and returned his letters unopened. Doubtless this intensified his dejection, and he forced his way into her presence and, finding that she was merely frightened and thought him crazy, he was convinced of the shallow nature of her who received him favorably when he was prosperous and had no sympathy for him when in trouble. During the rest of the play Hamlet acts as a nature of his profoundly moral instincts and sympathetic and acute intellectual perceptions might be supposed to.

Dr. Bradley elaborates his theory with profound knowledge of human nature, and tests every part of the drama by it. As said before, it accounts for many things Hamlet says and does, which no other explanation has done. Hamlet is sane, but under great tension.

It is difficult for any one to realize the frightful effect produced on a young man of exquisite refinement by the certainty of his mother's impurity. No one has ever observed a similar case, and we can only reflect that regard for the purity of the matron is one of the deep-seated inherited instincts and that a sense of elemental shame at its violation by a mother is inherently human, and, according to Shakespeare, is capable of paralyzing the will and forcing a man to find relief in 'wild and whirling words.' It might be observed in passing that all the four tragedies are motived by the violation or supposed violation of a primeval instinct. *Macbeth* turns on the violation of the instinct of loyalty to the chief as representing the tribe or the state; *Lear*, on the perversion of parental and filial love, and *Othello*, on the suspected betrayal of the sanctity of married love. These instincts are necessary to the ongoing of social order, indeed, to the very life of humanity, and are perhaps stronger in uneducated than in educated men, and as strong now as they were in the age of Elizabeth. The cynical perversions of them, of which we hear, do not weaken their general presence nor their elemental force in the least. Hence comes the 'universal appeal' of the Shakespearean tragedies, for they turn on primeval instincts.

Dr. Bradley shows that his conception of the character furnishes a rational explanation of Hamlet's conduct in all but one case. Hamlet's forgery of the commission carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to England, whereby they lose their lives, and his indifference to their fate, seems cold-blooded and not at all compatible with the idea of a 'pure moral nature under great tension.' It is hardly to be excused by Hamlet's supposition that they were cognizant of the purport of the packet, for a blank paper would have served his purpose

as well: It is true that Hamlet regarded them with detestation as treacherous spies masquerading as friends, and that he had reason to hate and despise the entire human race, with the exception of Horatio. Again, in Shakespeare's day,— the plays must of course be judged by the ethical standard of the time,— a judicial murder was not regarded with the horror it inspires in us. Further, Hamlet may have been one of those men who do not regard the lives of inferior natures as sacred — he is but slightly affected by the death of Polonius, and only says: 'Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell. Take thy fortune.' Even the just Horatio does not exclaim at the cruelty of sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death, but thinks only of the consequences when the news shall reach Denmark. We are not entirely justified in assuming that had Hamlet accompanied the envoys to England he would not have found some means to prevent their execution. But make the best we can of it, the forgery of the commission seems, in our way of thinking, a piece of premeditated and unnecessary cruelty. It shows that Hamlet could raise his hand against all his enemies but Claudius, the very one he should have attacked promptly.

Dr. Bradley's analysis of the minor characters evinces the same keen insight into human nature. Especially felicitous are his words on the Queen:—

The Queen was not a bad-hearted woman, not at all the woman to think little of murder. But she had a soft animal nature, and was very dull and very shallow. She loved to be happy, *like a sheep in the sun*; and, to do her justice, it pleased her to see others happy, like more sheep in the sun. It was pleasant to sit upon her throne and see smiling faces round her, and foolish and unkind in Hamlet to persist in grieving for his father instead of marrying Ophelia and making everything comfortable. . . . The belief at the bottom of her heart

was that the world is a place constructed simply that people may be happy in it in a good-humoured sensual fashion.

His analysis of Ophelia is less acute. 'No reasonable doubt,' he says, 'can be felt on the point that Hamlet was once sincerely and ardently in love with Ophelia.' 'But his love was not an absorbing passion,' and 'after her rejection of him by her father's command it was mingled with suspicion and resentment.' Is not 'sincerely and ardently' too strong an adverb? Ophelia's nature is too shallow to call out profound love in one so superior to her both emotionally and intellectually as the prince. He says nothing in his first soliloquy that indicates such feeling, and that is before she had refused to see him. Dr. Bradley points out that she was very young and inexperienced, and motherless, and also that after a 'storm of utterly unjust reproach not a thought of resentment crosses her mind.' But this indicates a lack of spirit and of self-respect rather than sweetness and unselfishness. The critic, though not carried away by sympathy for Ophelia's pathetic fate, as Coleridge and Hazlitt and Mrs. Jameson were, cannot quite resist a man's natural impulse to excuse a young girl. It may be, however, that it is not just to blame a passive character for not being active and energetic.

Of King Claudius Dr. Bradley says very justly that he is —

very interesting both psychologically and dramatically. On the one hand he is not without respectable qualities. As a King he is courteous and never undignified. He performs his ceremonial duties efficiently, and he takes good care of the national interests. He nowhere shows cowardice . . . Nor is he cruel or malevolent. On the other hand he is no tragic character. He had a small nature. . . . He was a villain of no force. . . . He had the inclination of natures physically

weak and morally small towards intrigue and crooked dealing.—He was not stupid, but rather quick-witted and adroit.

The King is one of the best examples to prove that Shakespeare drew at once types and individuals, *i. e.*, typical individuals. The criminal of this stamp, pompous, good-natured, sly, devoid of moral principle, but with a keen perception of propriety in appearance and bearing, trusting no confederates, capable of asking his Maker to pardon him for fratricide at the very moment that he is planning another crime, is not rare, though rarely detected. But Claudius is himself, though he is a member of the great tribe of shams. Hamlet's contempt for him and the fact that the King does not resent public exhibitions of it,—apparently it does not touch him in the least,—are significant. The absence of force in the character of the King makes more puzzling the question, why does not Hamlet annihilate him at once? In the first quarto, which represents the play before the psychological problem on which the later version turns had taken its final form in the poet's mind, Claudius is spoken of as having—

A face like Vulcan.

A look fit for a murder and a rape,  
A dull dead hanging look, and a hell-bred eye,  
To affright children and amaze the world.

Shakespeare never showed better judgment as to the effect of character on the countenance than when he erased these lines and let us imagine Claudius as a man of mean appearance,—a mildewed ear, a toad, a bat, and bloated by excess of drinking.

Dr. Bradley regards *Othello* as the most painfully exciting and the most terrible of the tragedies. If Desdemona were presented by an actress equal to Salvini in *Othello*, the impression would be unendurable.

Othello, he thinks, is more of a poet than Hamlet, though not possessing Hamlet's meditative or speculative imagination. He considers Othello to be a Moor, not a negro, but thinks that Desdemona's love overcame a racial repugnance no less strong than if he had been a negro. But is it not rather a social than a racial barrier that her love overcame? Her father and Emilia think she should have married some one whose name was in the 'golden book' of Venetian aristocracy, a Morosini or a Contarini, one of 'the wealthy curled darlings of our nation.' The Moor, though an honored soldier, was a foreign adventurer, to Roderigo, the young Venetian of fashion, he seems a 'wheeling and extravagant stranger.' In Dr. Bradley's analysis of the character of Iago he shows the same grasp of human nature evinced in his treatment of Hamlet, Iago's absolute antithesis. Referring to the fact that Iago had lived to early manhood without being found out, he says:—

Iago's powers of dissimulation and of self-control must have been prodigious; for he was not a youth like Edmund, but had worn the mask for years. . . . In fact, so prodigious does his self-control appear that a reader might be excused for feeling a doubt of its possibility.

Such a doubt is certainly justifiable, for the antecedents of Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth are entirely harmonious with the estimation in which they are held at the beginning of the play. But Iago is shown plucking the gull Roderigo in a manner which evinces long practice. How is it possible that he can have robbed his victims for years without the knowledge of his fellow soldiers? Such a man soon earns his reputation, yet Iago is called 'honest' by all. Again, how is it possible that Iago's malevolence was not called out till he was disappointed in his promotion? Circumstances contin-

ually conspire to test the patience even of a reasonable man. It seems more than improbable that he could have concealed his nature so many years in the rough and tumble of a soldier's life. This of course does not bear on the question of the excellence of a drama, for the position at the opening is assumed to be true; nor does the incongruity between the reputation and the conduct of Iago strike us when we see the play; we are so taken up by his present malevolence that we think nothing of his past. Nevertheless, this is the only one of the tragedies where a man's reputation at the opening is not harmonious with his character and previous surroundings and actions. Macbeth is radically weak and bad, but the temptation of finding Duncan in his power and the influence of his wife never before conspired to urge him to crime. He had waited all his life for just the necessary conjunction. Lear is plainly a noble, loving, impetuous nature, which during a very long life as King has never been thwarted and never come in contact with the realities of life. But Iago has not only concealed his real nature, but has built up a reputation at variance with his conduct.

Dr. Bradley considers *Lear* greater as a dramatic poem than as a drama. 'It is the tragedy in which evil is shown in the greatest abundance, and the evil characters are peculiarly repellent from their hard savagery and because so little good is mingled with their evil. The effect is, therefore, more startling than elsewhere; it is even appalling.' But 'there is another aspect of Lear's story, the influence of which modifies the impression that evil is all-powerful':—

There is nothing more noble and beautiful in literature than Shakespeare's exposition of the effect of suffering in reviving the greatness and eliciting the sweetness of Lear's nature. The occasional occurrence, during his madness, of

autocratic impatience or of desire for revenge serves only to heighten this effect, and the moments when his insanity becomes merely infinitely piteous do not weaken it. The old King, who in pleading with his daughters, feels so intensely his own humiliation and their horrible ingratitude, and who yet, at fourscore and upward, constrains himself to practise a self-control and patience so many years disused; who out of old affection for his Fool, and in repentance for his injustice to the Fool's beloved mistress, tolerates incessant and cutting reminders of his own folly and wrong; in whom the rage of the storm awakes a power and a poetic grandeur surpassing even that of Othello's anguish; who comes in his affliction to think of others first, and to seek, in tender solicitude for his poor boy, the shelter he scorns for his own bare head; who learns to feel and pray for the miserable and houseless poor, to discern the falseness of flattery and the brutality of authority, and to pierce below differences of rank and raiment to the common humanity beneath; whose sight is so purged by scalding tears that it sees at last how power and peace and all things in the world are vanity except love; who tastes in his own extreme hours the extremes of love's raptures and of its agony, but could never, if he lived on or lived again, care a jot for aught beside — there is no figure, surely, in the world of poetry at once so grand, so pathetic, and so beautiful as his. Well, but Lear owes the whole of this to those sufferings which made us doubt whether life were not simply evil, and men like the flies which wanton boys torture for their sport. Should we not at least be as near the truth if we called this poem the *Redemption of King Lear*, and declared that the business of the gods with him was neither to torment him, nor to teach him a noble anger, but to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life?

Dr. Bradley is as satisfying in his analysis of the minor characters as in his criticism of the philosophy and the construction of the play. His chapters on *Macbeth* show the same grasp of dramatic principle

and of the nature of poetry, the same perception of minute artistic beauty and the same comprehension of human character. It is rare that these critical faculties are united, and rarer still that they are backed by painstaking, minute examination of the subject-matter criticised. Most critics are satisfied by recording general impressions and citing the passages which sustain them, overlooking those which contradict. This is the habit of Coleridge and his contemporaries. But Dr. Bradley does not generalize without giving the evidence on both sides, and if the deductions from the various passages cannot be reconciled, he does not hesitate to say so. His citations are much fuller than those of any other critic, and his admiration for the plays does not prevent him from calling attention to faults of construction or irreconcilable statements where such exist. His notes — ninety pages in the Appendix — are full of what is called ‘Shakespearean scholarship,’ and show that mastery of minute points is comparable with breadth of view, literary appreciation, and practical knowledge of human nature. He demonstrates very plainly that it is impossible to construct a satisfactory time-scheme for *Othello*, even with the most liberal interpretation of Professor Wilson’s theory of a double time-standard ; that is, that the critical and exciting scenes of a tragedy seem to the spectator to follow rapidly and uninterruptedly and that Shakespeare intends such to be the effect, but by casual remark indicated sufficient lapse of time between them for the normal operation of cause and effect or for the movement of his characters between distant points. In *Othello*, however, there is no possibility that all the events after the arrival in Cyprus could have taken place in the short time indicated, nor is there any place between the scenes when we could conceive suffi-

cient time to have elapsed to render their sequence possible without contradicting definite statements. Frequently Shakespeare conceived the action so vividly that his plots hang together like natural events, but it is probably out of the question for any artist to manufacture a story in which there shall not be some contradictions and impossibilities. A rigid cross-examination rarely fails to detect these in a manufactured story, unless the witness professes to forget everything but one occurrence. The time-scheme in *Hamlet* is perfect if we allow the expression ‘It is a nipping and an eager air’ to refer to the chill of midnight, not to that of winter, but even here the flowers which Ophelia distributes and those in her garland belong some of them to June and others to August. Thus ‘pansies’ bloom in the spring, so do ‘crow-flowers’ (*Ranunculi*, *Buttercups*, *Celandines*, etc.); ‘long purples’ blossom in April and May, but ‘rosemary’ flowers in July and August, ‘fennel’ not before July, and no variety of ‘nettle’ before August. Other indications point to late summer as the date of the drowning of Ophelia. The matter is of little consequence, but shows that so many little circumstances cohere in the natural sequence of events that it is almost out of the question to construct a story which shall in every part harmonize with reality. The fifth act of *Hamlet* has sometimes been criticised as forced. The fencing bout is clearly to be a passage with blunted weapons, yet Hamlet feels a presentiment and Horatio counsels him to withdraw his consent if his heart misgives him, as if he thought the contest dangerous. When the fencers meet, Hamlet does not notice that Laertes is using a ‘sword unbated,’ — that is, without a button on the end, — though it is his part to keep his eye on his opponent’s point, till he is pricked. He ‘touches’ Laertes twice, — once a ‘very

palpable hit,' without drawing blood, showing that his foil has the usual button on the end. The strange thing is that neither Osric, the umpire, nor the calm and watchful Horatio notices that Laertes is using a dangerous weapon. The moment Hamlet is pricked he perceives the treachery — probably seizes the sword-hand of Laertes with his left in an access of fury, forces the foil from his grasp, throws his own on the ground, and wounds Laertes severely, for he dies before Hamlet.<sup>1</sup> Even then Hamlet gives no sign that he suspects his uncle till his mother dies and Laertes gasps feebly, 'The King — the King's to blame,' when he at once stabs Claudius with such force that he dies immediately, before Laertes. That nobody should perceive that Laertes was using a dangerous weapon is inexplicable,<sup>2</sup> but the audience never notices it, because the fact that a noble-minded young man is treacherously killed is

<sup>1</sup> The superiority of Hamlet over Laertes — the average young man — in physical strength is evident in this scene and the graveyard scene. Clearly he was no nervous weakling.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to Horatio's oversight in allowing his prince to fence against an opponent using an unbated point, we may imagine, if we are liberal-minded, that Laertes carefully covered the point with a leather button. This would enable him to say after Hamlet's death that his was one of the 'foils of a length' and that he took it by chance.

It is possible, too, that in Shakespeare's day friendly bouts might easily be made dangerous, and that Hamlet, knowing this, was justified in his anticipation of possible danger. Mr. Collier quotes from *Maningham's diary*, in which is the mention of the acting of *Twelfth Night*: 'Turner and Dun played their prizes this day at the Bankside; but Turner at last ran Dun so farre in the brayne at the Eye that he fell down presently, stone-dead. A goodly sport in a Christian state to see one man kill another.'

Shakespeare may have seen this occurrence, and must have heard of it, so Hamlet may have known that there was danger in a fencing match, but not have dreamed of treachery till he felt the envenomed point.

so fearfully exciting and presented with such force that the mind is filled with terror and pity to the entire exclusion of the analytical power. Emotion is so forcibly aroused that reason is in abeyance. The address is to the imagination, not to the mind, and details which are not part of the tragic movement are properly omitted, though they must have happened in the ordinary sequence of events. If there is sometimes no intimation of a lapse of time sufficient for them, — for instance, for news of the ‘grievous wreck’ of the Turkish fleet to reach Venice and the appointment of Othello’s successor to be made and the bearer of the commission to reach Famagusta, — the oversight is of not the slightest consequence artistically, because it does not detract from the imaginative power of the drama. It is one of the many points of excellence in Dr. Bradley’s criticism that he keeps matters of constructive detail subordinate to questions of effect on the imagination, though his ability and learning in dissecting the former is of the highest order.

#### GEORGE PIERCE BAKER

Professor Baker’s *Shakespeare as a Dramatist* is characterized by the genial, urbane common sense of modern Harvard scholarship. The author bases his thesis solidly on facts, and brings to their interpretation his practical experience in reproducing at Cambridge Elizabethan plays on an Elizabethan stage. He seeks to visualize Shakespeare’s plays as they were first represented. He takes the ground that in criticising the dramas of any period we must consider the theatre of the period and the audiences of the period, their habits of thought and their prejudice in favor of the stories and the method of treatment to which they were accustomed. Novelties in the theatre make their

way slowly even now, and are subject to the approval of the audience. The author of a play must write with his spectators in mind. Consequently, every artist, especially every dramatic artist, must learn his trade and regard himself as a continuation of his predecessors. All that genius can do is to develop the method in vogue and improve by practice ; but it may develop a crude method and make it applicable to productions far superior to those it takes for models. It puts new wine into bottles very similar to the old ones. Dryden was therefore entirely wrong in making Shakespeare say :—

Untaught, unpractised, in a barbarous age,  
I found not, but created first the stage.

Shakespeare was neither a genius independent of old traditions, striking out a new form of art, nor was he merely a superior craftsman, slavishly bound by commercial considerations, producing poetic dramas unwittingly, and ‘growing great in his own despite.’ At first he was deficient in the art of telling a story dramatically, as an examination of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* shows. But the action of the *Comedy of Errors* and of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* shows improving skill, and in the *Merchant of Venice* he proves that he has learned how to concatenate the incidents of a play and weave three stories into one so as to hold the attention of his audience and not shock them with palpable improbabilities. In the historic plays he was bound more or less by the record, which might cover a series of episodes of equal importance. Here he soon learned to attain unity by concentrating interest on a single strong character like Richard III, or to relieve the pageant-like chronicle with a group of realistic figures like Falstaff and his hench-

men. Then, when he went on to higher comedy and tragedy, he developed still further the art of putting on the stage interesting and attractive individuals whose characters have both background and foreground. Consequently they are not only effective stage figures, but they are types of humanity as true for one generation as for another, for the background of character is the same now as it was in the seventeenth century. In a word, Shakespeare developed normally, and by exercising his great natural powers in the same field with his contemporaries ; learning one thing at a time, sometimes neglecting one province of his art temporarily by reason of his interest in another, his eye in writing always on the theatre and the audience, and yet not disobedient to the heavenly vision, a conscientious artist creating beautiful things and yet a dramatist writing for the contemporary stage, a poet but a friend and fellow in a cry of actors.

All this and much more in detail Professor Baker makes clear and definite by reference to the plays themselves. The artistic and professional life of the dramatist has never before been made so comprehensible and convincing and so within the common law. This common-sense exposition is much more satisfactory than Professor Dowden's attribution of the plays to life periods dominated by various moods : the joyous period of youth, the disillusionment and gloom of early manhood, the profound pessimistic philosophy of maturity, and the tranquil reconciliation of age, thus making the character of the plays depend on the way the writer felt or on some heart-searching experience, and not on what he had learned of his profession ; on stages in the soul-history of the author instead of on stages in his technical skill and slowly acquired knowledge of men and things combined with

the general development of the drama and the changing taste of audiences. Perhaps such periods did exist, certainly Shakespeare acquired with years and experience insight into more than technical method; but a man writing for the public must consult its taste and not his own, and must subdue his spirit to what it works in. At all events here are the plays to prove, by citation of scene and line, increasing skill in first one part of the dramatic art and then in another; whereas periods of joy, depression, despair, and reconciliation, still more a reason for such periods, can be inferred only indirectly and by the exercise of considerable imagination. The development of power in constructing a plot and in creating characters is vastly more important than the changes in metrical usage the plays display, of which Mr. Fleay makes so much. The first is part of the intellectual effort put forth by the artist; the metrical form is merely the clothing of the thought.

The same vigorous adherence to fact and use of conjecture only when there is no other way to harmonize imperfect knowledge marks Professor Baker's chapters on the Elizabethan theatre. It is extremely probable that, when there were half a dozen theatres competing for patronage, new mechanical devices would be invented and tried continually. There are always among the English some ingenious mechanics in every art, and there was the example of the court masques to stimulate invention. A stage as large as that at the Fortune, 'fortie and three foote of lawful assize in length' and at least twenty-eight feet deep, indicates that the business of theatrical presentation had developed in magnitude. As it did so, it would also attract to itself such ingenious devices as commended themselves to the managers. Professor Baker's illus-

trations enable us to get a very clear idea of the stage of Shakespeare's day. It was a large platform, not quite as high as the head of a man, projecting into the uncovered central part of the building. In it about halfway from the front were two pillars supporting a roof over the rear part, at the back was a balcony, and under the balcony was a space at the back of which were doors for entrance of the actors. The interesting question is, how far were hangings or painted scenery used, and how far did the manager avail himself of the use of curtains. As Professor Baker very sensibly says, no two Elizabethan stages were exactly alike in all appointments, and this, indeed, shows that improvements were being made. As to the use of scenery, it would seem that 'painted cloths' were used in the upper part above the balcony. It would require but very little ingenuity to devise something to make the space underneath represent Prospero's cell, or the cave dwelling of Belarius, which Imogen enters.

With regard to the use of a blanket or curtain, it undoubtedly served to shut off the upper stage,—the space under the balcony,—so that Prospero could 'discover' (uncover) 'Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess.' Whether a curtain was ever suspended on a rope between the pillars so as to make a front stage, a middle stage, and an upper or rear stage under the balcony, besides the balcony itself, is not absolutely certain, but is highly probable from the citations Professor Baker gives, which indeed cannot well be interpreted on any other theory. Nor does it seem possible that 'old stuttering Heming' or whoever else had charge of the stage arrangements could have overlooked so obvious a device, and one which would give so valuable an addition to stage effects. Altogether, the

stage offered the playwright more resources for theatrical effect than Coleridge imagined.

Professor Baker regards the plays primarily as acting plays, and never for a moment strays beyond his thesis, the 'development of Shakespeare as a dramatist.' But he is far more than an antiquarian seeking to visualize material conditions long passed. He needs a clear idea of the theatre, to show how and where and when the author took forward steps. Here and there we see that he appreciates the æsthetic value of the plays, the beauty of the phrasing, and the light thrown on human character, but those are not his present theme. He adheres to his point of view, which is more than some scholars do. In insisting that the ordinary uncritical theatre-goer is more interested in a story than in a character in a story, he hardly does justice to that convenient person, the 'average man.' Of course we average men like a story; we like to see things happen, we love a fight, —second hand; many of us, when young, first hand, —and therefore go to football games. Energizing, physically and intellectually, is life, and we average men like to live and to see younger men live more energetically than we can. We like to follow the adventures of a man or a set of men with whom we have become acquainted, for we thereby 'economize attention' and get more impressions from a certain amount of exertion. We like the events of a story to be concatenated and to lead to something, so that each adds to a remembered pleasure. We do like a story, a story with action and unity, and we leave to our betters pleasure in psychological problems. But we are social animals and sympathetic animals, and we attach ourselves to those of our fellows who seem to typify what we should like to be, or who possess qualities that contribute to the ongoing of the race. So in a mimetic representation we like to see

a man in action, exciting, interesting action, making love, combating an enemy, or extricating himself from danger, subject to good or evil chance. But the person must be an interesting person, otherwise we soon tire of his adventures. If he possesses physical strength and grace, he is to a certain extent admirable ; if he possesses force of will and mental power, like Richard III, he may have an abiding attraction even if he is bad, for those qualities are necessary to the welfare of society, and we instinctively regard the man with favor. If he is refined and intellectual and of a thoroughly kind nature, if he sympathizes with humanity freely and easily, we are sometimes irresistibly attracted to him, even if, as in the case of Hamlet, his motives are so complex as to be unreadable. In other words, it is the character that attracts the majority of spectators in a theatre, not the story alone ; and Shakespeare drew characters, not to practice his highest art, but because men like men even in the mimic world. Several of his contemporaries, notably Fletcher, told a story in scenes and acts as well as he, and we are tired of them, not because they are old-fashioned, but rather because their characters are not men and women, but merely names prefixed to theatrical parts. Professor Baker points out very clearly the increase in the power of presenting character — accompanied very likely by an increase in knowledge of the depths of human nature — which marked the career of Shakespeare, which is no less distinct, though developing later, than his skill in telling a story in dramatic dialogue. It is the plays in which appear the characters with charm, Viola, Beatrice, Rosalind, Portia, Hamlet, or with power, like Lear, Macbeth, and Othello, that have survived on the stage by reason of the favor of audiences. Shakespeare's name carries some of the others, like *The Taming of the*

*Shrew*, and his poetry or wit carries others as dramas to read, like *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Henry IV*. The story of *Hamlet* might be told with the Prince in the background, but the expression ‘*Hamlet* with the part of Hamlet omitted’ testifies that the character of the prince is the central and perennial attraction. The story might be told and the poetry but slightly weakened if the prince did not appear; but when the soul is out the play is dead. The uncritical spectator feels the attraction of this character as well as any one, though he is totally unable to analyze, much less to formulate, his impressions. It is the boy in us—a large part—that loves a story; the man loves to come in contact with a strong man, or a brilliant man, or a good man, and to surrender to him. In life we are constantly fooled by sham men and women, who seem brave and unselfish, but in Shakespeare’s world we are never disappointed. There is always more in his people—good or bad—than we thought at first, and therefore some of his plays retain their hold on the public as plays, not merely as dramatic stories.

Professor Baker does not go nearly so far as the above would imply. Indeed, he says: ‘Like the child, an audience, loving story-telling for its own sake, craves some compelling figure whom it can follow sympathetically or even with fascinated abhorrence.’ But again he says: ‘In reading it is characterization which tells most; but on the stage, it is a story in action.’ The character-interest does more than enhance or unify the story-interest on the stage, it is an independent element also. The action of the character may be largely a subjective or internal struggle, embarrassing to the movement of the plot. The uncritical spectator discerns it, perhaps better than the critic, and is moved by it if the art is of a high order. Phrasing and story-telling are important, but

Shakespeare's supremacy depends on his mastery in the most difficult and telling part of the dramatist's art, the ability to conceive and draw characters which interest and attract.

Professor Baker's book illustrates the sane and judicial method of twentieth-century scholarship, which investigates carefully the minutiae of a subject without ignoring the architectonics, the higher things and the broad principles. It avoids the error of materialism, which sometimes attempts to formulate the phenomena of a higher order of facts in terms of the categories of a lower order of facts, and also the error of ultra-romanticism, which assumes that the higher order of facts exists in a rarefied atmosphere, independent of ordinary mundane conditions. It bears much the same relation to the Coleridgean criticism that Professor James's pragmatism does to the Hegelian philosophy. The thesis that the theatre reflects the national life is carried through the book as a *Leit-motiv*, but it is applied with reference to known facts of our own day and of history, and to the permanent attributes of human nature. The Elizabethan stage is portrayed as it really was, not essentially cheap and makeshift because it lacked the ingenious mechanism of our theatres, but a place where a dramatist could make the same appeal to his audience he tries to make to-day. Consequently the impression we gather from Professor Baker's pages about the poet and his career and the original effect of the plays is more full and rounded and, we instinctively feel, truer than anything romanticism can furnish. The book is literary criticism because, in a measure, it enables us to see the plays as the author and his friends saw them, and to correlate them with the society of the day and of our own century.

## CHARLTON M. LEWIS

Professor Lewis's essay, *The Genesis of Hamlet*, collects all the arguments in support of the theory that the first dramatic presentation of the story of Hamlet was by William Kyd, about 1590, who took the principal incidents of the plot from an English translation (or the original) of a historic novel in French, itself based on a much earlier story in Latin by a Dane known as *Saxo-Grammaticus*. From this play of Kyd's, of which we have no copy, proceeded, by the usual process of reproduction and rewriting, the play by Shakespeare preserved for us in the imperfectly reported first quarto printed in 1603. Next year appeared the second quarto, nearly twice as long and much elaborated in style and incident. This is the complete play, as we have it, for the copy in the folio is the same with some omissions.

Furthermore, there is a crude German play, using the Hamlet plot in most of its features, which can be traced back to 1710, but is evidently a work of a much earlier date. The source of this was on the first casual reading supposed to be the first Shakespearean quarto, but examination shows that the two are in parallel states of development and must be derivatives from the same original, the hypothetical lost play by Kyd. We have therefore the germ, the *Hystorie of Hamblet*; we postulate a missing link; and we have a German and an English derivative from the missing link and the final, highly developed English organism. The problem is to reconstruct the missing link with the merest hint of a fossil bone in a pamphlet of the period. We have the two ends of the series, the secondary form, and the abortive German by-product, and some knowledge of the environment in which the missing link grew, the method and manner of the dramatist Kyd in constructing a tragedy.

Reasoning from effect to cause is a hazardous proceeding, especially when the cause is multifarious, and one of the elements, the genius of Shakespeare, outweighs all the rest in efficiency in the ratio of fifty to one. Professor Lewis's argument is admirably lucid, and is cogent as far as meagre circumstantial evidence can make a case. That Kyd did write a play on the subject seems about as certain as anything can be which is not definitely stated in the literature of the period. That the German play was derived from this seems more than probable. That Kyd's play suggested to Shakespeare to write a play on the same subject from a totally different (because Shakespearean) standpoint, seems hardly less so. That he carelessly left in his finished work some expressions or hints of situations to be found in the original which do not seem strictly in line with any reasonable theory of his characters or plot, may be possible. These incongruities—survivals or atrophied organs in the process of evolution—Professor Lewis points out with great acuteness, and his handling makes the subject extremely interesting. But when he says that the 'composite Hamlet is not an entity at all, and, therefore, not a subject for psychological analysis,' we cannot follow him. As well say that a man is not a physiological entity because he has a pineal gland and a vermiform appendix, or not a psychological entity because, in addition to the habits imposed on him by his bringing up, he is swayed by instincts of cruelty—and loyalty—derived from his barbarian forbears.

The fact is, psychological analysis cannot be applied to men of the Hamlet type until it has developed much further than it has to-day. Every day we attribute the actions of ordinary men to a set of everyday motives: love, family affection, greed, vanity, love of applause,

selfishness, envy, and the like. If their actions cannot be motived in any one of these convenient categories, we say they are unaccountable, that is, the man in an analysis is a fool or a lunatic. If he does something particularly brave or unselfish, the reason for which we cannot find in our own little list, we feel that there was a reason for it in his character, though we cannot give it a name. It is impossible to predict how a man of high intellectual qualities and a specially developed emotional nature will act in circumstances that try his soul. When he does act, it is impossible to explain exactly why he did what he did. He did it because he was himself. Hamlet is a type of such a man, highly wrought emotionally, highly developed intellectually, and placed in distressing circumstances. Because we are unable formally to analyze the complex motives of such a man when his action seems contradictory, gives us no right to say—as his friends said of Shelley—that he is not an entity or not a normal man. Problems insoluble to plane geometry yield to calculus; but we still analyze character by elementary methods. A chemist, finding a refractory compound, does not at once decide that it is non-reducible. He tries to improve his apparatus.

Only a small fraction of what Hamlet does can be referred to ordinary, comprehensible motives. He joins the guardsmen in watching for the reappearance of his father's ghost, incited by reverence and wonder. Seeking an interview with Ophelia after he had been moping in the palace—‘foregoing all custom of exercise’—for two months might be attributed to a desperate desire to find out whether there was one woman in the world with a soul. The scheme of the ‘Mouse-trap’ may have been formed from the natural wish to obtain corroborative evidence. Refraining from attacking the

King when praying is the result of a religious belief held by his contemporaries. He acts with a direct view to results when he forges the commission on shipboard, and in killing Polonius he thinks he is accomplishing an object. But everything else he does is the result of his character and the state of his mind. What is the object of his brutal treatment of Ophelia and her father, of his 'wild and whirling words,' of his bitter reproaches to his mother, of his absurd willingness to fence for a wager when he has serious business on hand? These are not actions prompted by a simple motive — or by any comprehensible balance of motives — such as we find in the everyday man when he 'makes up his mind.' They are the result of a peculiar congeries of emotional capacities worked on by distressing events. Judged by the ordinary workings of the human mind, his nature is inexplicable. 'We feel certain, however, that high and noble qualities — love of his fellows, a horrified disdain of vice, an inability to compromise with evil — are moving him, we cannot tell exactly how, because the way is beyond the reaches of our intellect. But that is no reason that we should not speculate about the way, for coming into imperfect contact with a rare and noble character is a better education than scientifically analyzing thousands of the average men who crawl between earth and heaven. Hamlet himself is confident that he will be justified if he is 'reported aright to the unsatisfied,' but the report must be made by one who 'held him in his heart.'

Professor Lewis argues that since the obstacles to the hero's revenge in the *Hystorie* and in the German *Hamlet* were objective they were so in Kyd's *Hamlet*. The German Hamlet feigns madness deliberately to secure his own safety. He says he cannot attack the King because he is 'guarded.' 'He has no qualms

of conscience, no hesitation or irresolution'; he never loses sight of his object, which is revenge and to gain the kingdom for himself. Now Shakespeare, at the period of writing this play, was more intent on character than on plot, although a past-master of construction. Adventures were not so much to him as were people undergoing adventures. He minimized external dangers — as Professor Lewis says, 'resolved them into the fourth dimension.' Professor Lewis is of the opinion, however, that certain parts of the action originally motived by external danger to the hero were retained by Shakespeare or allowed to remain when the reason for their existence had been taken away, and that in consequence the dramatic action is 'in some features inexplicable.' This may well be, and the theory affords a means of confessing and avoiding the difficulties found in making the conduct of the play conform to comprehensible cause and effect.

The essayist in support of the above proposition points out that in the original *Hystorie* and in the German *Hamlet, or Fratricide Punished*, and presumably in Kyd's *Hamlet*, the obstacles the hero must overcome were objective, — he could not safely attack the King because he was 'guarded.' His scheme of feigning madness is therefore not purposeless, because he was an object of suspicion. Shakespeare's Hamlet is, however, in no immediate danger until he himself arouses the suspicion of the King. Yet as soon as he has received the disclosure of the ghost he administers to the guardsmen a solemn oath:—

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,  
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,  
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on,  
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall, . . .

[By] such ambiguous giving out, to note  
That you know aught of me.

As Professor Lewis justly says, 'To present him as resolving on the pretense (a totally unnecessary one) in the white heat of his first wrath and vindictiveness is very doubtful psychology.' The words, therefore, he thinks, are a part of the old play left in the new one. But cannot we regard the words as a survival as words, but not in the old sense? Hamlet is in such a condition that he cannot be held strictly responsible for what he says. Why should there not drift through his mind the idea, 'This is going to be too much for me. I must let myself go occasionally as I did a moment ago. I must tell my friends not to notice my behavior.' So that the words are not the formation of a definite plan, but an apology in advance for what seemed to the speaker inevitable.

In the German play Hamlet is about to disclose to Horatio and Francisco the message of the ghost, and desists and requests secrecy because he thinks that the underground words of the ghost indicate displeasure. He tells Horatio what the ghost said as soon as Francisco has gone. In the Shakespeare play Hamlet of his own motion insists on non-disclosure, even of the fact that the guardsmen have seen the ghost. This injunction is quite as foolish as his decision to feign madness. He might reasonably have confided in Horatio. Kyd invented the ghost and the underground echo, 'Swear.' It would be rather derogatory to Shakespeare to say that he retained the underground business on account of the excellent theatrical effect, leaving the request for secrecy apparently motiveless, and it is certainly as much so as the request to his friends not to notice his future antics. It is better to say that both requests are indications of a perturbed mind, no less so than his 'wild

and whirling words," which cause Horatio to forget for the moment the respect due to his prince.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Lewis is of the opinion that there is nothing to indicate that Shakespeare ever read the Hamlet story in the French of Belleforest or in the English translation; or, in other words, that the missing play by Kyd alone furnished the suggestions of incident and character worked up into *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. But there is one plot-element in the crude mediæval novel as translated by the Frenchman which is almost entirely obliterated in the German play. It was therefore presumably not used by Kyd, a supposition made more likely by the fact that it furnishes a psychic motive altogether too profound for any one but the master, who was attracted by its very profundity. The central figure of the *Hystorie of Hamblet* is a Scandinavian boy prince, in a hostile court, bent on revenge for the murder of his father, feigning madness for his own safety, and in the end accomplishing his object and recovering the crown of Denmark for himself. It is simply a story of successful revenge. But this youth is possessed by the Teutonic race-horror of the crime of adultery, and rebukes his mother in an interview strictly parallel to that in which Hamlet so bitterly upbraids Queen Gertrude. In the German play this boy appears as a young prince, and is informed of the murder and his mother's guilt by his father's ghost. The originals of all Shakespeare's character-group surround him,—pale ghosts of Polonius, Horatio, Osric, and the rest. His mind is

<sup>1</sup> It might be suggested as a motive for secrecy on Hamlet's part that he feared that if anything came out it would reflect on his mother. The ghost shows a chivalrous desire to shield the woman, and enjoins his son not to 'contrive against his mother aught.' Judging from the fourth scene of the third act, Hamlet for two months believed that his mother was privy to the murder. Hence possibly his nervous dread of publicity.

full of desire for revenge, and he alludes to his mother's shame as a secondary matter. The natural conclusion is that Kyd made the boy a young man and regarded the plot simply as a story of revenge. In Shakespeare's mind the figure of a young prince, compounded of intellect and emotion, the flower of Elizabethan society, having in his heart the ineradicable race-instinct for female purity, coming suddenly into contact with the wickedness, stupidity, and selfishness of the conventional world, and absolutely solitary till he finds one friend, was slowly developed. He portrayed such a man, and the conception has made a great impression on other people ever since. He did not build on the old foundations, though he used much of the old material. The revenge motive is obscured in the artist's mind by the terrible situation of the young man after the disclosure of the ghost,—a situation almost as awful as that of *Oedipus*,—and is thrust to the background, whence it emerges from time to time when Hamlet pulls himself together, but it never remains long enough to be operative. The terrible mystery of human wickedness and guilt in one from whom he drew his life prostrated the young man's soul with the sharp anguish of pity and shame known only to the heroic. He is too well balanced to be driven crazy and kill both mother and uncle, but is in a position that would render any one else insane. When the ghost tells him to 'revenge his foul and most unnatural murder,' Hamlet replies :—

Haste me to know 't— [that is, tell me who it was] that I,  
with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge.

The ghost then informs him that his uncle was the criminal, and, had he stopped there, Claudius would have

been dead before daybreak ; but he goes on to explain the manner of his taking off, and also—what seems strange in a father—to tell his son that his mother was an adulteress. He enjoins his son not to punish the woman, and bids him ‘remember me.’ Hamlet, on the departure of the ghost, bursts out in the magnificent invocation to earth and heaven and hell. Conscious that this experience must determine his life, he vows that ‘thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain.’ Then, coming back to actualities, he cries with an exceeding bitter cry, first :—

*O most pernicious woman !*

and then —

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!

Standing there with the ruins of the moral world about his feet, what is duty, what is revenge? That which sustains both, relation to the outer world, to other people, has disappeared ; for the moment he is on one side and the rest of the world on the other, there is no reciprocity between him and living men.

The conception of a man paralyzed by elemental shame is of course Shakespeare’s, and it would seem that he must have got the hint from Belleforest, not from Kyd, and strengthened the paralyzing force by letting the son think his mother privy to the murder. The source is of little consequence, for the development goes far beyond the germ. All of Shakespeare’s heroes possess a strong, normal subconscious life — they belong to the human family. When emotion wells up from the depths it does not always result in rational thinking. Grief sometimes intermittently and temporarily paralyzes the thinking apparatus, and relief is found in spasmodic, irregular, and irrational action. Hamlet’s emotional

disturbance is far more profound and lasting than any grief can create. The form in which it manifests itself is peculiar to him as an individual, its intensity is determined by the fact that he is a typical human being. The primitive instincts on which the evolution of society rests have not been obliterated in him by cynicism or experience in a conservative, commercial world ; though a prince, he is still a man.

Professor Lewis points out in his first chapter the futility of the ‘Coleridgean theory’ that Hamlet was a ‘man of wide and keen intellectual powers, but feeble will.’ This theory hardly needs refuting nowadays, any more than does the theory that Hamlet was insane. ‘The general gender bear him great love,’ and the general gender are never interested in a dead man or an insane man. So they soon forget the tragic heroes of other dramatists, who are usually insane or dead, or in some intermediate state, and accept Hamlet as a brother of the human race.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible for a writer of fiction to avoid discrepancies in relating parallel series of events. Shakespeare is as accurate as any novelist can be in taking account of the lapse of time, but he sometimes fails. The play of *Hamlet* occupies, from the death of the father to that of the son, four months plus the time from the presentation of the ‘Mouse-Trap’ to the final catastrophe, for Ophelia says at the play, ‘It is twice two months’ since your father died. She must be taken *au pied de la lettre*, for she is precisely one of those limited intellects who are exact in the matter of dates. The interview with the Queen-mother and the death of Polonius take place immediately after. The arrest and deportation of Hamlet follow hard upon,—say next day. The pirates attacked the ship ‘ere we were two days old at sea.’ An indefinite time must be allowed for the return of Hamlet, because when he arrived Laertes was already in Elsinore, having been recalled from Paris, or overtaken on his way, by the news of the death of his father. The fencing match is at once arranged for, as soon as Hamlet had met Horatio, passed by the churchyard, and entered the castle. It takes place in the hall. Immediately on the fatal end-

## PROFESSOR RALEIGH

The latest work in Shakespearean criticism (1907) is Professor Walter Raleigh's *Shakespeare*, one of the

ing Fortinbras appears, having been successful in his Polack wars, and the ambassadors from England enter. In the interim, therefore, a ship had finished the voyage to England and returned to Denmark, and Fortinbras had completed a campaign. But if we allow a considerable time for Hamlet's absence,—the pirates may have set him ashore at some distance from Elsinore, a port they would naturally shun, or he may have remained in hiding,—the interval may have been long enough to allow for the return of the ship from England. The time after the representation of the 'Mouse-Trap' is, therefore, indefinite, but not so long that Ophelia's flowers could not be still in bloom. The four months before that present one discrepancy. Hamlet says at the opening of the play that his father was not two months dead, and that the wedding followed the funeral within a month. If we call the interval between the murder and the official announcement of the marriage with which the second scene opens, six weeks, the body lay in state three weeks, giving time for Laertes and Horatio to be recalled to the official funeral. The only objection to this is that Horatio would probably have seen Hamlet in the three weeks between the funeral and the wedding. Hamlet, therefore, moped in the palace for two months and a half before he got up the 'Mouse-Trap.' This makes up Ophelia's 'twice two' months since his father died.

For the time of year we must work the other way, beginning with the murder. Snakes do not emerge from their hibernation much before the first of April, and Claudius was altogether too acute a man to start the rumor that the King was stung by a serpent at a period when every peasant would know that snakes are as harmless as walking-sticks. Nor would even a hardy warrior King be likely to sleep in the afternoon in an open pavilion accessible to snakes much before May-day, say April 15. This would bring the ghost scene about June 15, a date which harmonizes all the conditions but one. The night is evidently short, for the ghost leaves at one o'clock, and Horatio notices that the sun is about to rise after he and the guardsmen have discussed the situation. The sun rises at half-past three on June 15 in southern England and at twenty minutes past two in Elsinore.

series of *English Men of Letters*, which have so amply illustrated the wealth of contemporary England in men

June 15 is a little early for glowworms, but the discrepancy is slight. But next night at twelve Hamlet says, ‘The air bites shrewdly, it is very cold.’ Horatio replies, ‘It is a nipping and an eager air.’ That would not apply at all to the damp chill of a summer midnight, even supposing that the young men were cold with apprehension. It means frost, or at least a temperature in which glowworms would have permanently ‘paled’ their ‘ineffetual fires.’ Again, the night before Horatio speaks of the dew. He may mean dampness, but even so, it is incompatible with a ‘nipping air.’

If the murder is dated April 15, the ‘Mouse-Trap’ was presented August 15. Ophelia’s death would then occur early in September, and the flowers she presents, though some are out of season, may reasonably be accepted as possible. But there is very little time allowed for the ship to return from England or the energetic Fortinbras to finish his war. Three weeks at least is necessary.

Slight discrepancies can be found in Thackeray, Fielding, Trollope, and others. The events in Hamlet hang together remarkably. Shakespeare’s time-scheme is much more out of order in *Othello*, but we do not notice it in reading because the total impression is of things happening in sequence. Irregularities in the time-scheme are of course much less important than those pointed out by Professor Lewis, and very likely arose from the same cause. It is impossible to make the details in fiction fit together as they do in real life. In real life Fortinbras would not have disembarked his ‘lawless resolute’ on an island and marched across merely to take ship on the other side. Apparently, Shakespeare did not know that Elsinore was on an island. Again, a June night at Elsinore is all twilight, and no star could be said to ‘illumine that part of heaven where now it burns.’ Arcturus himself, if visible, would be but the faintest twinkle.

• Another point which may be regarded as a legacy from the Kyd play is the anomalous position of Hamlet at the Danish capital. He has his own suite in the palace, though he is ‘most dreadfully attended.’ He is the heir-apparent in a civilized court, but he is an heir-apparent without a party, a state of affairs unknown in English history. He is a cultured and attractive young man of thirty with no personal friends but one, whom he attaches to himself

of culture and scholarship. Two hundred and thirty-seven pages is scanty room in which to display the

after the play begins, — a state of affairs impossible at any court, where there would certainly be some men like Kent, Edgar, Macduff, and Lennox. The court in the Belleforest story is mediæval and the prince is a helpless boy, so his isolation is less unnatural. We might say, then, that Hamlet's position is a survival from the old play, but a more reasonable point of view is taken when we say that the play is a poem, no matter what scrap of the older story clings to it. Thus the Danish court is not a real court made up of average human beings, but a poetic presentation of 'this present evil world' — that is, the evil part of it. It is a court made up exclusively of selfish, indifferent, stupid, and unsympathetic people, and Hamlet is the good man, solitary and bewildered, coming to comprehend his moral isolation, an isolation impossible in real life but made complete in the play for the sake of poetic emphasis. The cases of partial isolation we sometimes see in real life are hardly less pathetic, but for dramatic effect Hamlet's moral solitude must be complete, with the relief of only one sound-hearted but limited friend.

The position that Hamlet's conduct is partly due to shock at the second part of the ghost's disclosure does not lessen the difficulty of comprehending his unique and high-strung character. The play turns on a psychological problem: how will a shocking and shameful disclosure respecting a loved mother affect a man of highly moral nature and refined temperament already in a condition of melancholy? Shakespeare says that it paralyzed him for two months, during which he refrained from 'all custom of exercises' and remained in stupefied inaction. At the end of the period he endeavors to see the girl he had loved (not very profoundly, it is true). When he looks at her he sees, once for all, the hopelessness of any sympathy. He has recovered tone partially, and welcomes his college friends warmly and frankly, though he is still in a highly nervous and irritable state, to which irony gives some relief. He is rather unreasonably hurt when he discovers that it is not a 'free visitation,' but that the young men have been 'sent for.' He describes his condition in beautiful and touching words, but, strangely enough, he is not irritated when they, utterly unable to comprehend him, respond with vacuous grins, but takes up the news of the advent of the players with eagerness, almost enthusiasm. These young men have been terribly abused by critics, but

views of so capable a critic as the author, and in consequence the book has in places the effect of too great

they are simply ordinary, harmless persons,—finely developed specimens of the genus bore. Their contrast to Hamlet is so great that as we love him we instinctively hate them, which is hardly fair to the great body of the human race. Then Hamlet takes up the idea of the ‘Mouse-Trap,’ not without justification, for he may reasonably have felt that there was a bare possibility that he was mistaken. If we talk about Hamlet as a real man we cannot regard the ghost as a veritable ghost, but only as a poetical and highly effective theatrical device for presenting the effect of suspicion ripening into conviction but calling for proof. Hamlet’s nervous tension is very marked when his device is successful. This is, however, no more evidence of insanity than stumbling after violent exercise is evidence of drunkenness. His reluctance to kill his uncle in sanctuary is natural enough for a seventeenth-century man. His spasmodic murder of Polonius is very unfortunate, for from that time till he returns to Elsinore Hamlet is under arrest. His return to the castle is an act of the highest courage. His conduct at Ophelia’s grave is due to a nervous breakdown, perilously near insanity. His willingness to play the ‘friendly wager’ is the supremest folly, for he had the King’s commission in his pocket, and could easily have raised a party against him. But impulsive, high-strung men do act and talk impulsively.

Hamlet was, of course, never the man to form a practical plan, looking to all details and thinking of nothing else till it was executed. He is far too much given to abstracting particulars and considering how they fit into the general plan of the universe,—he is far too much of a poet. But he is a man of so much general intelligence and so entirely destitute of physical fear that, had the sacred duty of revenge been laid on him when he was in normal psychical condition, it is impossible to believe he would not have carried it out. What prevented him except his mental anguish? What caused that stunned, inert mental condition for two months, followed by spasms of semi-hysterical raving alternating with moody inaction, except the double conviction of his father’s murder and his mother’s shame? And the last was by far the more potent. In the tragedy of *Hamlet* effect follows cause, but the effects are complicated and remote phenomena of human nature, and the cause is the distressing nature of the conditions confronting a unique character — unique in degree, not in kind.

condensation and of a construction limited by necessity and unjust to the author's mastery of his theme. The style is brilliant, without any appearance of conscious effort. The numerous quotations worked into the page, many of them without quotation marks, testify to the writer's familiarity with the text, and witness to the fact that a line apposite to the expression of every shade of thought can be found somewhere in the plays.

The first chapter is entitled 'Shakespeare,' and has to do primarily with his character as artist. Of Shakespeare the man we have little but negative knowledge, indeed, we know nothing of him as a living and com-

In all the tragedies the experiences are subtly fitted to the character that undergoes them, so much so that were the characters interchanged there would be no tragedy. In *Hamlet*, not only is the central character a very complicated and elusive one, but the experiences cannot be related to anything that we or any of our friends have undergone or that we have read of in another book. Hence the great difficulty in analyzing his motives is lack of any sufficient analogies in experience, though we are conscious of the fundamental truth of the tragic action.

#### *Flowers distributed by Ophelia*

Rosemary blossoms in July and August.

Pansies        "        " May, but later when cultivated.

Fennel        "        " July and early August.

Columbine    "        " June.

Rue        "        " June to September.

Daisies (some varieties) blossom all the season.

#### *Flowers in her garlands*

Cornflowers blossom in May and June.

Nettles (some varieties) blossom all the summer.

Daisies    "        "        "        "        "

Long Purples blossom in May and June.

Some of the above might have been dried herbs, but their average time of flowering is near enough to August or early September for a dramatist, though not for a botanist.

panionable spirit. Of Shakespeare the artist, criticism has revealed a great deal. We know the man was successful in affairs. From this we can gather that he was destitute of the improvident, impatient, and self-indulgent temper which we know prevents thrift. He certainly was destitute of the qualities which make enemies, for, had he been arrogant, opinionated, and selfish, some record of quarrels resulting from such qualities would surely have survived. We are sure that he was not positively bad, but we are not sure that he was positively good. Now a man may be a great poet and yet be a person of little positive force either for good or evil, and he may be a fine artist and yet at the bottom not at all an estimable person. Professor Raleigh thinks :—

No dramatist can create live characters save by bequeathing the best of himself to the children of his art, scattering among them a largess of his own qualities : giving, it may be, to one, his wit ; to another, his philosophic doubt ; to another, his love of action ; to another, the simplicity and constancy that he finds deep in his own nature.

With this no one can find fault, but it applies to Shakespeare the craftsman and artist, and not to Shakespeare the man. Professor Raleigh may make the distinction in his mind, but he does not make it clear. Is it not time that we acknowledge once for all that, while we may learn a great deal as to how the writer of the plays reacted imaginatively on what he learned from observation or from books, we know and can learn nothing positively about the way in which he reacted habitually on the everyday world in his daily speech and conduct ? He may have been reticent or effusive, selfish or generous, dictatorial or yielding, possessed, indeed, of any qualities except those

which render fruitless great mental powers. He was industrious and self-controlled within the limits necessary to worldly success. Can we go much further? At all events, when Professor Raleigh goes on to build up a personality for Shakespeare's father he is careful to say, 'The bare facts, so far as they lend themselves to portraiture, seem to supply suggestions for the picture of an energetic, pragmatic, sanguine, frothy man, who was always restlessly scheming and could not make good his gains. We guess him to have been of a mercurial temperament, and are not surprised to find that he was a lover of dramatic shows.' This conjecture gives life and animation to the page, and is frankly stated as conjecture. The further conjecture, that the poet's aristocratic descent on his mother's side may have been not without effect in making him appreciative of the character and bearing of high-born ladies, has at least a plausible basis. Nothing affects the character of an imaginative child more than the tradition of well-born ancestors. The author, in the next chapter of his delightful book, shows himself well aware of the danger of assuming a theory and then interpreting the facts in its support. His theory is : —

A new type of character meets us in these plays (*The Tempest* and *Winter's Tale*) ; a girl innocent, frank, dutiful, and wise, cherished and watched over by her devoted father, or restored to him after long separation. It is impossible to escape the thought that we are indebted to Judith Shakespeare for something of the beauty and simplicity which appear in Miranda and Perdita, and in the earlier sketch of Marina.

A touching and interesting and suggestive picture that brings Shakespeare close to our sympathy, but the author hastens to add : —

These speculations may easily be carried too far ; and they bring with them this danger, that prosaic minds take them for a key to the plays and translate the most exquisite works of imagination into dull chronicles and gossip. Perhaps we do best to abide by the bare facts, and the straightforward tale they tell.

The third chapter, headed ‘Books and Poetry,’ considers the books Shakespeare might have read and those he evidently did read. It recapitulates the literature of the day, and makes a vivid — Professor Raleigh always succeeds in making his descriptions living — picture of the conditions of the time. He points out how ‘rich’ the plays are in the ‘floating débris of popular literature,— scraps and tags and broken ends of a whole world of songs and ballads and romances and proverbs. Few of his contemporaries can match him in the wealth that he caught out of the air or picked up by the roadside.’ In considering the sonnets he inclines to the idea that they (some of them ?) ‘express his own feelings in his own person’ and ‘are not merely poetic exercises.’ ‘The situations shadowed are unlike the conventional situations described by the tribe of sonneteers, as the hard-fought issues of a law-court are unlike the formal debates of the courts of love.’ That is to say, the feeling is so intense that it could have been aroused only by imagination working on a real and remembered situation. This is the crux of the question, and imaginative people — the only ones entitled to judge — will agree with him.

The next chapter is on the development of the theatre and of Shakespeare’s plays. As it contains but thirty pages, no systematic treatment is possible, but the author touches lightly and always originally on many topics. He points out that the scenic illusion is produced by poetic description. In *As You Like It*, he says ‘a

minute examination of the play has given a curious result. The words "flower" and "leaf" do not occur. The oak is the only tree.' Doubtless the effect is produced, first by the words of Charles the Wrestler:—

They say he is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him ; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England : they say, many young men flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world.

This at once rouses the boy in every one of the audience. Who is there that does not long to be with the old Duke and 'fleet the time carelessly'? Then the lyrics heighten the illusion, and we are perfectly willing to admit that 'under the greenwood tree' 'this life is most jolly.' The effect is produced by two or three touches of poetry, as Professor Raleigh says. But he is not quite exact in saying 'the oak is the only tree.' Rosalind finds some verses on a 'palm tree,' and if 'hawthornes and brambles' and a 'rank of osiers' do not rise above the dignity of shrubs, at all events the cote which the cousins buy 'right sodainly' and without any fuss over conveyancing or searches of title, is 'fenced about with olive trees.' But this has no bearing on the truth that the sylvan atmosphere is created by a very few poetic touches, and by the consistency of the whole with 'losing and neglecting the creeping hours of time' under the shade of melancholy boughs, where,—

'T is but an hour ago since it was nine,  
And after one hour more 't will be eleven.

The next chapter, 'Story and Character,' or Shakespeare's materials and how he handled them, is much the longest, occupying, indeed, more than one third of

the book. It, too, is full of brilliant appreciations expressed in striking language. He takes a different view from most modern critics when he says :—

At this point of the play (the opening) improbability is of no account : the intelligent reader will accept the situation as a gift, and will become alert and critical only when the next step is taken and he is asked to concede the truth of the argument — given these persons in this situation, such and such events will follow.

Before appealing to the sympathies and judgment of his audience he has to acquaint them with the situation. Until the situation is created he cannot get to work on his characters.

It is true that in some of the plays the situation is developed early ; in *Lear* in the first and second scenes and in *Hamlet* in the first act, but in *Othello* and in *As You Like It*, for example, the first act puts us in possession of the surroundings but not the situation. In every case the characters are made interesting at once. The ‘situation’ in the first case is a high-spirited husband ‘wrought’ and ‘perplexed in the extreme’ by insinuations against his young wife, who has left home and kindred for him ; in the second it is two girls, one of them masquerading as a boy, running away from home, united by a genuine friendship, and finding the lover of one of them in the Forest of Arden. In neither is the situation created till the characters have made a definite impression on the audience, and not till the second act. Othello is never greater or Desdemona more attractive than before they leave Venice, and the varied charm of the two cousins is displayed in the court of Duke Frederick as irresistibly as in the cote ‘at the tuft of olives.’

He is wide of the mark, too, when he says that ‘the King in *Hamlet* is little better than a man of straw,’

and that 'we see him through Hamlet's eyes.' The scoundrel is solidly drawn, and any one is to be congratulated who has not had the reality of this one of Shakespeare's portraits forced on him by personal contact with some verbose, rhetorical hypocrite, given over to sensual pleasures, and entirely unconscious of the wickedness of his acts till there is imminent danger of exposure. If we 'see him through Hamlet's eyes' (and Horatio's, too) we see him as he is, for the disillusioned Hamlet looks — perhaps too deeply for his own good — into reality. The world is apt to accept fatuously the judgments of Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the Queen and Osric, the shallow judgments of the conventional majority.

The chapter is, however, full of epigrammatic truth. It is true that Shakespeare is 'curiously impatient of dullness and that he pays scant regard and does no justice to men of slow wit,' and in this he differs from Chaucer or Goldsmith or Addison. Stupidity is made absurd, as if he had a rooted contempt for the non-intellectual. The fool in *Lear* may be an exception, but Horatio, sometimes spoken of as non-intellectual, which he is in a limited sense, is a man of ability. The author points out the underlying family resemblance in Shakespeare's women, — a resemblance compatible with great variety of character. 'They are almost all practical, impatient of mere words, clear-sighted as to ends and means.' They do not accept the premises to deny the conclusion, or 'decorate the inevitable with imaginative lendings.' This may be a feminine characteristic, but is it not true of Shakespeare's women, with the possible exception of Ophelia and Gertrude? They look resolutely at facts with entire absence of what we are accustomed to call feminine perversion of logic. But they are feminine enough in their instinctive perception of

the motives of others. There is a part of their minds in which Beatrice, Imogen, Viola, Cordelia, and Rosalind are sisters, and, horrible as it may sound, Lady Macbeth, Goneril, and Regan are of the same family. Not one is affected.

The last chapter is largely taken up with a discussion of Shakespeare's language and style, which seems rather out of place, though we could have wished it longer. The book is made up of fragmentary interpretations of the plays looked at under certain aspects by a brilliant writer. The conditions were such that it could not be exhaustive of any one topic, but it is beyond question vivid, original, and interesting.

#### CONCLUSION

Several of the less important criticisms of Shakespeare have not been mentioned, though in nearly all of them can be found valuable hints or brilliant appreciations. The essays in the periodical press are numberless, and to refer to them, however briefly, would make a book encyclopædic in character and more than encyclopædic in volume. The general object of this book as stated in the introduction was to epitomize the critics who initiated or emphasized advancing points of view and a more philosophic insight. Though it cannot be said that there has been from the beginning a steady progress towards an intelligent and adequate conception of the plays, for the habits of thought of one generation may easily be more conservative than those of their predecessors, the advance from Ben Jonson to Professor Bradley is as marked as in any other department of human thought in the same interval, not excepting natural science or religious philosophy. When the plays were first printed the qualities that most attracted admiration were the story, the wit, the elo-

quence, the music, and the phrasing, all largely qualities of form, though of form related to substance. Ben Jonson's eulogy, as far as it passes from generalities to particulars, dwells on the 'easy numbers,' 'the well-turned and true-filed lines':—

The dressing of his lines,  
Which were so richly spun and woven so fit.

Even the writer of the verses in the Second Folio, who alludes so finely to the reality of Shakespeare's kings, lays by far the more stress on the variety and beauty of his style, 'the embroidered robe' woven by the muses. The repetition of the epithet 'sweet' or some equivalent is monotonous in the seventeenth-century criticism.

The spirit of the eighteenth century was so little akin to Shakespearean art that the critics of the age made no forward step. It was forced upon them by the verdict of the public that Shakespeare was interesting, and most of them felt the superficial beauties of the plays; but they considered him 'irregular,' and gravely doubted whether they ought to approve of a poet who disregarded 'good taste' and poetic justice. It was plain to them that he would have been much improved by a classical training, and they lacked the enthusiastic love of artistic things which must lie behind rational criticism of an artist. So they confined themselves to textual corrections, and thought that a tragedy by Dryden was more regular than one by Shakespeare, in which no doubt they were correct, for regularity means accordance with rules recognized by the critic.

In the early nineteenth century, Coleridge, drawing his inspiration from Germany and gifted with the true critical faculty, took a new standpoint. He insisted on Shakespeare's remarkable power of drawing characters;

complex, interesting, and true to human nature. He showed that the poet was more than a singer or a story-teller ; he was an interpreter whose creations had a true correspondence to life. ‘True to nature’ did not mean that the stage figure to which it was applied should recall oddities of manner or diction, but that it should be actuated by the unique complex of habit and motive we call individuality. The play itself was a unity, because it was held together by a rational perception of moral cause and effect and was written under the dominance of a single poetic mood, and not because the time of the action was consecutive or the place unchanged. The romantic age thus contributed to a better understanding of the poet of a century earlier. This understanding has been greatly developed since, and the tendency is to analyze the great characters more fully and to find in the action a sound philosophical conception of life and to see that the great elemental passions and affections, which are the basis of all morality, underlies it. We find the plays correspond more closely to our philosophy of life as our philosophy comes to correspond more to reality. There has been no step backward, for when once the notion that the poet was an inspired savage, a great but irregular genius who would have been vastly improved by education, was eradicated, a juster estimate became traditional. Now, every one can discern power of which Dr. Johnson was entirely ignorant and beauties to which he was blind. We see that Shakespeare was a thinker, because we know the difference between formal and instinctive thinking. The conception that Shakespeare ‘held the mirror up to nature’ at first covered the idea that his portraits were realistic and animated, and at once typical and individualistic. Now the word mirror has come to have a wider significance. The

correspondence is found in the depth of the reflection. Nature is not merely the human nature of men gathered in social groups, it is the whole framework of things in which man is rooted. Lear and Macbeth are as natural as Benedick and Falstaff, though the background of the last two is a social group, and of the others opposing forces whose conflict is in the moral world.

This juster and fuller comprehension of the poet of our race has not resulted in blind worship. Shakespeare's faults — well analyzed and summed up by Professor Bradley — are frankly admitted. Professor Bradley regards as inartistic construction the introduction into a tragedy of matter which does not forward the development of the action nor accentuate the presentation of characters, as, for example, the long speech of the player in *Hamlet* and the hero's discourse on the art of acting. These, though interesting in themselves, could be omitted without loss to the general interest. It must be remembered, however, that an effective stage presentation compels concentrated attention, and concentrated attention must be relieved after a few moments. This relief can be obtained by consecutive scenes, in different moods, between different members of the character group, which forward the action but, by change and contrast, lessen the emotional tension in the audience, which is not one man but a group reacting on itself. Absolute relaxation follows scenes which do not involve the relations of the characters at all, so that it may be good art to introduce such scenes in a tragedy. The trained athlete spars gracefully with relaxed muscles till the proper moment for violent exertion, otherwise his strength would be prematurely exhausted. So the artist presenting an exciting story might be wearied and his audience become distracted if no breathing spells were allowed. The fourth and

fifth acts of *Othello* sustain emotion at a height, and for a time that makes it painful, as any one must admit who remembers Salvini as Othello. And this is true, though the catastrophe is relieved and adorned by poetic diction more than in any other tragedy.

Professor Bradley thinks, too, that the undeniable faults of construction, the impossibility of constructing a consistent time-scheme in some of the plays, the occasional use of diction which, if it does not deserve the epithet 'bombastic,' is nevertheless more rhetorical than dramatic, are the 'faults of a great but negligent artist,' *i. e.*, of one who did not finish all parts of his work with the conscientious care of Milton or Tennyson. The soliloquies, too, are in some cases too evidently addressed to the audience, thus putting the player in an inartistic relation to them and taking him out of the character for the moment. These points cannot be controverted, though their force is mitigated by the reflection that the writer might have been pressed to finish a play when not in the mood.

The poor quality of Shakespeare's puns excited Dr. Johnson's wrath, and arouses the contempt of the modern reader. We become tired of the repetition of lie and lie, angel and angel, light and light, and the rest. We must remember, however, that the play on words had just been invented, and puns passed current which have now been permanently retired from circulation as containing too large a percentage of cheap metal. Had Shakespeare lived in the golden age of the pun, it is not likely that he would have rivaled Thomas Hood, but his puns would have been at least as neat as those of Sheridan or Theodore Hook. His wit is of another and more refined kind, and the point that he was a poor punster is of infinitesimal significance.

We are apt to judge the plays as if they were writ-

ten for a reading public. But they were written for the company to present to an audience of men. Among them were some university men more or less acquainted with the Latin classics or with the modern Italian literature, and a few writers and lawyers and courtiers, but these plays and some songs and ballads were the only contact the greater part of the audience had with literary art. They had a general acquaintance with the names of the gods of Roman mythology, a slight traditional knowledge of history and of English folklore, and were accustomed to stage representations. The readers, scholars, and dilettanti were too few to give a critical tone to the body of hearers, who stood or sat in the daytime and in the open air instead of the close, heated air of the modern theatre. This audience did not represent 'society,' as the Jacobean audiences did and as modern audiences do ; it reflected the national temper, which was vigorous, elated, and masculine. Englishmen had just conquered Spain, they were ready to set sail on adventurous voyages, determined to find the 'Northwest' or the 'Southwest Passage,' — to achieve something romantically new. They played grandly with life, — they suffered from no constitutional malady. They felt what Sir Thomas Browne calls 'the contempt of death from corporeal animosity,' much as our plainsmen did. They did not fear death less than we, — that is a matter of individual temperament, — but they were much less shocked by scenes of fatal violence, by representations of slaughter. This audience had, of course, its effect on writer and players. Violent deaths are frequently represented on the stage, and the language is sometimes coarse. The coward is always regarded with contempt, but not more than are the carpet knight and the dilettante. The characters must be men and the passions those common to the human

race. In comparison with Shakespeare's, how pale, thin, unnatural, and anaemic seem the heroes of Congreve's dramas when the stage had become fashionable and the audience sophisticated. Some of the characters of the drama of the Restoration are brave, gallant, and witty, but they are not deeply rooted in human nature, because the audience responded more readily to the conscious and artificial ideals of a social group than to the more general and unconsciously held ideals of humanity. For the same reason Shakespeare's epigrammatic lines have a quality of directness and force like folk epigrams or proverbs, and are quite unlike Bacon's apothegms. The obscurity noticeable in his later work, especially in *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, disappears when the syntax is disentangled. Then, if the sentences are read aloud and the parentheses and ellipses are marked by the natural intonation, the meaning falls readily into the mind of a hearer. They were written to be delivered by a trained speaker to an audience of men.

The temper of the audience, then, accounts for what might seem faults or carelessness in the writer of the plays and for their virile, open-air qualities, but not in the least for their poetry, nor their correspondence to a moral scheme of life. Some of the audience, it is true, may have been dimly conscious of the solidity and truth of the revelation they witnessed with little thought beyond its amusing or exciting qualities. Criticism, intelligent examination and reflection, has brought out hidden elements and put the tragedies on a higher plane, possibly higher than their author ever imagined they would occupy. There are those who think that a purer, more natural pleasure is derived from reading the plays, independently of all that has been written on them, than comes from read-

ing them with some knowledge of what others have written about them. But such an independent reading is impossible, for now no one can take them up without a conscious and subconscious knowledge of how they are regarded. It is the spirit in which criticism is assimilated that counts, and the more we understand the intimate constitution of the tragedies, the higher our estimate and the more refined our pleasure. We may admire in a general way a range of mountains : the verdure of the slopes, the shadows of the ravines, the suggested eternity of the bare heights. It is true that a microscopic study of the rocks may not make the range appear more beautiful, in fact, may divert attention from its magnitude and strength ; but when we learn that it is the mother range, an Archæan uplift, the result of cosmic forces working in the depths of the planet, we regard it with a new interest that approaches very close to reverence. The heights are not merely beautiful, they are from central depths. The great tragedies are greater when we find that they are grounded in the primal passions of humanity, that at the bottom they are simple and elemental and related to the constitution of things. Nor are their superficial beauties lessened, and even the scars on the surface come to have their significance, when we know that the plays are not merely Elizabethan literature, but an expression of humanity. Criticism, from Coleridge to Bradley, has established for us the literal truth of Ben Jonson's line :—

He was not of an age, but for all time.



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